

# BANDWAGON

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

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# Bandwagon

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## THIS MONTH'S COVER

The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Red Unit spec and elephant long mount is pictured in 1978.

Barbara Woodcock is standing on the lead elephant with Buckles Woodcock standing in lower right corner. Bill Woodcock photo.

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## CHRISTMAS ADS

The November-December Christmas Special *Bandwagon* is traditionally the largest issue of the year.

You can extend season's greetings to your fellow members by taking an advertisement in this issue. The cost of ads is listed in the masthead.

## CORRECTION

The Dan Rice article in the July-August issue contained misleading illustrations. Author David Carlyon writes: "Rice claimed he had made the 'Great Union speech,' mentioned in the caption on page 16, but it probably never took place. The caption on page 20 may be even more confusing for readers, since Rice likely did not wear such a costume in New Orleans in 1861. As I tried to explain in my paper, he was bad-mouthing the Union in New Orleans that winter and would be unlikely to wear anything smacking of stars and stripes. The claims that he had been arguing for the Union and that he wore this costume appeared later, as part of his campaign to retroactively recreate himself as a Union patriot. In addition, I am not convinced that the frequently-used photo reproduced on page 13 is actually Rice."

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP AND CIRCULATION AS required by 39 U. S. C. 3685.

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(16) Publication of Statement of Ownership will be printed in the September-October 1997 issue of this publication.

I certify the statements made by me above are correct and complete. (signed) Fred D. Pfening, Jr., publisher. (9-18-97)

## BACK ISSUES OF BANDWAGON

1966-Jan.-Feb.  
1967-July-Aug., Nov.-Dec.  
1968-All but Jan.-Feb.  
1969-July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.  
1970-All but July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.  
1971-All but Mar.-Ap., May-June.  
1972-All available.  
1973-All but Nov.-Dec.  
1974-All but Mar.-Ap., May-June.  
1975-All available.  
1976-All but Jan.-Feb., Nov.-Dec.  
1977-All but Mar.-Ap.  
1978-All available.  
1979-All but Jan.-Feb.  
1980-1986-All available.  
1987-All but Nov.-Dec.  
1988-1997-All available.

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## ANYONE CURIOUS ?

1933 List of Ringling-Barnum. 153 People in Acts, 39 Clowns, 23 Statue and Menage Performers, 20 Wild West Performers, 7 Miscellaneous Persons with Weekly Salary of each during the Madison Square Garden Engagement with slightly fewer Personnel on the Road. \$3.00.

1953 Ringling-Barnum Property Manifest- 8 Legal Size Pages of all circus owned property with detailed description of RR cars, wagons, animals, Etc., It even names and describes each of the 83 horses and names the 27 elephants. It too is \$3.00. Both of the above \$5.00

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The career of Orrin Hollis (1858-1926) as a great bareback somersault rider possibly arose from his sister, Ella (1855-1934), falling in love with and marrying John Davenport, Sr. in 1869.

In spite of Davenport being too large in stature to be a good standing rider himself, he had a considerable awareness of the skills of the three important personages in the original one ring circus, the ringmaster, the equestrian and the clown.<sup>1</sup> By 1873 he had built a second ring barn in Toledo, Ohio. For some time, in addition to managing theaters, he trained ring horses and riders. In 1873 his fifteen year old brother-in-law, Orrin Hollis, was one of his pupils. Davenport next turned to the training of his three talented sons and two daughters as principal riders. One of them, Orrin Davenport, who received the name of his uncle, was then becoming a polished top rider.

Ella Hollis Davenport was a pad rider who also did song and dance specialties as a concert feature accompanied by the music of a banjo. Her last entrance into the circus ring was a few years later when she was in a carrying act with her brother on the Grenier Bros. Circus.

Meanwhile, Orrin Hollis and his father-in-law had signed on the F. Dunham Show in 1875. After appearing on the John O'Brien Show in 1877, Orrin joined Sells Bros. Circus for 1878 and 1879. In 1878 he did somersault pad riding and also appeared in a two horse act with Viola Rivers. John Davenport, Sr. was a clown and ringmaster as well as a performer in the concert.<sup>2</sup>

In 1880 Orrin Hollis appeared on P. T. Barnum's Greatest Show On Earth. During the next decade through 1890 he shared his time on the Adam Forepaugh Circus (1881, 1888-1890), on Sells Bros. Circus (1882, 1883) and on the Barnum & London Shows (1884-1887).<sup>3</sup> The 1887 engagement on Barnum & London included the exclusive Madison Square Garden combined performance with the Adam Forepaugh Circus.

Beginning about 1884, Hollis developed into a principal bareback somersault equestrian, having discarded the pad that he had used previously. At that time his act was clowned by the well-known Carron brothers. During that decade he appeared opposite

## THE HOLLIS FAMILY

By John Daniel Draper

a number of renowned standing riders such as Charles and Jennie Ewers (1881), Joe Tinkham (1886), Julia Lowande (1888), Tony Lowande (1889), Charley Watson (1890) as well as the manege rider, Mattie Jackson (1886).

In 1887, in addition to principal bareback acts opposite Charles Fish and William Showles, Orrin rode in one of three colorful acts as "The Typical American Jockey." In this trio William Showles represented "The Typical English Jockey" and Don Geromino Bell presented his pre-eminent bareback hurdle act.

Two years later on October 9th, Hollis sailed to Europe to be welcomed on John Sanger & Son's Royal Hippodrome as the "Prince of All Riders."<sup>4</sup> Earlier that season while appearing on the Adam Forepaugh Show, he had done the best somersault bareback act of his life. Then

Orrin Hollis as pictured in the 1902 Great Wallace route book. Pfening Archives.



on August 9th his fortunes changed when he injured himself during his jockey act. While he was dismounting he collided with his horse. When he tried to do his somersault bareback act, he was so lame that he could not stand on his horse. However, in two months he had recovered sufficiently to make the European trip.

From 1883 to 1893 frequent mention was made of Orrin's wife, the former Eva Bennet. She appeared in all instances on the same shows as he did. On September 26, 1890 she celebrated her 33rd birthday, receiving a number of handsome and useful presents. A banquet in her honor was served after the performance.<sup>5</sup>

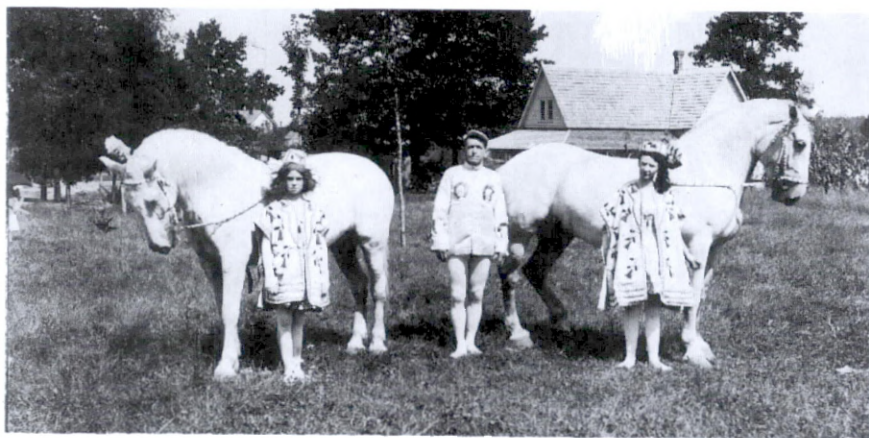
Eva was variously listed as a concert performer (1883), with an elephant act in the concert (1884), as an entree rider (1885, 1893), as performer with her husband, Orrin, (1888) and as a song and dance artist and Humpty Dumpty (1892).<sup>6</sup> No further references were found concerning her life or her career.

In the next period of his life through 1904, Hollis appeared chiefly on three circuses: John Robinson's Circus (1891-1893), Ringling Bros. Circus (1894-1895) and the Great Wallace Shows (1896, 1902-1904).<sup>7</sup>

He was also listed in the 1891 route book for Hunting's Circus as Hollis, the comique-grotesque.

There were very spirited daily contests in 1891 among Hollis and two other champion riders, William Demott and George Holland. The next year, in addition to being a principal trick rider, he engaged in Roman standing races on the hippodrome track with Robert Stickney and John G. Robinson. In quieter moments he was a concert ticket collector. In 1893, in addition to Hollis, some of the performers were again Robert Stickney, Jr. and John Robinson as well as Albert "Stick" Davenport and Adell Nelson. On Ringling Bros. Circus in 1894 Orrin, billed as the World's Champion Somersault equestrian, gave a high class principal riding act with William De Van as his ring director and Julius Gilet and Jules Duval as his object holders. That year he also presented a finished and exciting champion jockey riding act. The following year the personnel was the same except that his ringmaster was Edward Shipp.





On Great Wallace in 1902 the four riders Blanche Reed, Winnie Sweeney, Alexander G. Lowande and Hollis, made a big hit in very good riding acts.

For 1903 Blanche Reed was Hollis' partner in an artistic, graceful and new double trotting act. Winnie Sweeney and Hollis rode two black rosin backs named George and Fred. Hollis was in a principal bareback somersault event opposite Harry Lamkin in a similar exploit.

At that time the Great Wallace Show was known to have a very good circus program and a great horse show, but it was also noted for its accomplished shell game grafters. As a whole they were a set of robbers.

The 1903 season is also remembered for the Great Wallace train wreck at Durand, Michigan on the night of August 6th-7th.<sup>8</sup> It was there that, when the air brakes failed, the engine of the second section crashed into the wooden caboose of the first section. The caboose was demolished and the railway trainmaster and the circus train master were both killed along with twenty four crew bosses, canvasmen and other workmen. Forty four additional persons were injured of whom four died later. Many animals including the elephant Maude were lost. The performers, including the Hollis family, were not among the injured.

To further illustrate potential dangers in those years, on October 7, 1904 there was a blowdown of the Great Wallace big top at Gulfport, Mississippi.<sup>9</sup> The gasoline lights had just been lit and a disastrous fire could have resulted but for the quick action taken.

That year in addition to Hollis, there were in the equestrian contingent Madame Marantette, her adopted daughter Florence Harris, and William Melrose.

Melvin, dressed as a girl, Orrin and Nettie Hollis on Campbell Bros. in 1910. Pfening Archives.

Orrin Hollis split the 1905 season between the W. P. Hall Show prior to August 30th and the Gollmar Bros. Circus for the balance of the tour. In his riding that year he was paired with Kittie Kruger. After 1905 she rode on the Sells-Floto Circus.

The first mention of Nettie Hollis was in 1906 when she appeared with the Orrin Hollis Family on Sun Bros. Circus.<sup>10</sup> This was also the first year their son, Melvin, was listed as a performer. At that time Melvin, also referred to as Pinkie, was eight years old.

Nettie and Orrin, soon to be joined by Melvin, became known as the Hollis Family of riders. In addition to Orrin's principal bareback, somersault and trick riding, he and Nettie did a two horse carrying act and demonstrated the dextrous use of a phaeton in a clever driving act. Nettie was also a good manege rider. Somewhat later, in 1914, Mrs. Nettie Greer<sup>11</sup> joined the family riding act.

The Hollis family spent the 1907 through 1911 seasons on Campbell Bros. Circus.<sup>12</sup> During these years Orrin and Nettie had as their colleagues a host of prominent riders who rode opposite them: Fred Costello and Norma (Mrs. Albert) Davenport (1907), Charles Barnett, Daisy Miller and Edward Crandell (1908), Charles Barnett, Nellie Lowande, Cecil Lowande, Linda Jeal and Edward Crandell (1909), Delta Woods, Charles Barnett, E. M. McCrea, Albert Davenport, E. V. Hocum and Gladys Hocum (1910).

Beginning in 1909, their eleven years old son Melvin was a regular member of the family troupe. During the early spring of 1910 Orrin, his wife and Melvin were busy at the Campbell Bros. winter quarters at Fairbury, Nebraska.<sup>13</sup>

The next five seasons, each spent on a different circus, would see Orrin's riding career come to a close. With his family, he appeared during this interval on a number of smaller shows. In 1912 the Hollis family, consisting of Orrin, Nettie and Melvin, rode on W. H. Coulter's Cole Bros. Circus.<sup>14</sup> Orrin also served as equestrian director.

The following year found the Hollis Troupe on Downie & Wheeler's Worlds Best Railroad Shows Combined.<sup>15</sup> The contract of Orrin Hollis & Son with that show for the 1913 season specified that they were to furnish two somersault principal acts, a jockey act and a carrying act. They were also to provide one or two ring horses and Mrs. Hollis was to ride in the parade and in the entree and to do a manege act. Their combined pay was \$75 per week. Based at Oxford, Pennsylvania, Downie & Wheeler's thirty two wagons and two small carts were carried on a train of nine cars back, consisting of five flats, two horse cars and two sleepers. The color scheme on the railway equipment was yellow and red with gold lettering.

In early 1914 Hollis purchased a fine home in Sylvania, Ohio eight miles northwest of Toledo. He erected a fifty by fifty foot ring barn and began practicing and developing some of what he hoped would become the best riding acts in the business. When the circus season began, he and his family were on the Mighty Haag Show.<sup>16</sup>

The Hollis family was engaged by Coop & Lent's Enormous Shows United for the 1916 season. Opening at Cedar Rapids, Iowa on April 26th, it traveled on twenty four cars.<sup>17</sup> Principal riding in three rings was done by Albert Davenport, his wife Norma, and Melvin Hollis. Display number sixteen was double jockey riding by Davenport and his wife and Orrin Hollis and Melvin. In addition, Rhoda Royal's four horse act with Freddy Collier as rider was on the bill. Jack Cousins was the equestrian director.

This show was generally well received for the June 14th date at Loudonville, Ohio, but created some unhappiness as related in this account from the local press: "It was not long until it was learned that the management had decided to give an afternoon but no evening performance. Their decision was a great disappointment to the town people as well as the farmer boys of the community, who had intended to take their sweethearts to the wonderful



glittering big-top at night. The street parade, which left the show grounds on Hayesville Road at 12 o'clock, was indeed a brilliant spectacle with its beautiful horses, chariots, two bands, bagpipes, steam calliope, elephants and even pretty ladies. There was a large crowd attending the show and they spoke in glowing terms of the performance and the many courtesies extended by the management. However, all our hopes vanished when the city of canvas was razed to the ground following the afternoon performance and left for Letonia some time during the night."

In 1916, 58 years old Orrin Hollis and his wife were still riding. At one stand their 18 year old son, Melvin, was working his bareback act on a soft track where it was hard for his horse to get a good footing. In spite of this adversity, he turned somersaults and stayed on his horse better than the average rider would do under the very best of conditions. It was expected then that Melvin Hollis, in the next year or two, would be one of the high class somersault riders of the country.<sup>18</sup>

After an interval of eleven years, Melvin at the age of 19 was back on Sun Bros. Circus in 1917. In addition to jockey and hurdle riding, he served as assistant director of amusements. Apparently he finished the season on Sparks Circus.<sup>19</sup>

Although a preliminary announcement in *Billboard* in 1918 stated that he would be on Sparks Circus when May rolled around, Melvin Hollis was riding on the Walter L. Main Circus opposite William Wallett in bareback somersault tricks while La Petite Bessie Cooper was performing on the single trapeze. In October of 1918 Melvin and Bessie were married.<sup>20</sup>

On March 11, 1918 a very tragic event occurred in the lives of Orrin and his family members when Mrs. Hollis was burned to death at their home in Sylvania, Ohio. A lighted lamp on a wall bracket in the kitchen slipped from her hands and ignited her clothes.<sup>21</sup>

The loss of his wife in this terrible accident was not the first personal tragedy for Orrin Hollis. In 1886, over 30 years before, while on the Barnum & London Show, he had accidentally shot Abdallah Ben Said, an Arab, appea-

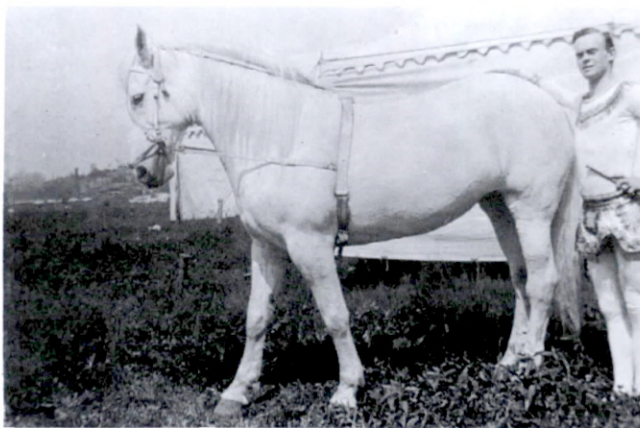


Nettie, Orrin and Melvin Hollis around 1914. Circus World Museum collection.

ring with that show. A year previous while on the same circus he had experienced a near fatal tragedy when a box of matches accidentally ignited in his satchel. When the box fell on his bed the sheet was ignited. In suppressing the flames, Orrin burned his hands and feet so badly that he was unable to ride for several days.<sup>22</sup>

In February of 1919, serious practicing of bareback acts was proceeding at the training barn near Toledo. Melvin and his bride Bessie were preparing for the coming season. That year they were listed in the

Melvin (Pinky) Hollis on Coop and Lent in 1916. Pfening Archives.



route books of both Walter L. Main Circus and Sparks Circus.<sup>23</sup> Orrin Hollis occupied himself in 1919 by taking side show tickets on Walter L. Main. That circus, owned by Andrew Downie, was a fifteen car show, the title leased from Main. In 1919 the Wirths, including May as well as Phil and Stella were on the show. During the summer, Frank, May's husband, arrived as a visitor from Australia.

In 1919 Melvin and his wife were riding mostly on Sparks Circus as principal equestrians as they would be through the 1923 season.<sup>24</sup> Beginning in 1920 Orrin was on Sparks through 1923, except for 1921 when he worked on the front door on Walter L. Main. In 1920 on Sparks he was successively equestrian director, superintendent of concert tickets in 1922, and a member of the ticket department 1923.

Sometime during this period Orrin married again. His bride was Minnie Dunne (1863-1923). At least as early as 1887 until 1891,<sup>25</sup> she had a successful career on the Grady, Pickett and Primrose Circus (1887) and the Adam Forepaugh Circus (1890-1891). She had been a well known vocalist in vaudeville and also had success on the circus hippodrome track as a hurdle rider and a lady flat race rider as well as a four horse chariot race driver. In addition she was an expert bareback rider.

Meanwhile, on Sparks Circus, Melvin and Bessie Hollis were busy with their principal riding acts in addition to Pinkie's somersault act. They became close associates of the bareback riders Walter Guice and his wife, Flora Bedini. By 1923 this quartet of riders had built the Guice-Hollis Troupe, presenting both a comedy bareback riding number and a straight routine. They hoped that their efforts would result in a big riding act on the order of the ones of the Wirths or the Hannefords. Along the

way there were several setbacks. At the end of the 1920 season Pinkie lost his best ring horse to pneumonia. In 1922 Bessie was out of the riding acts in August after she broke her arm at Middletown, New York.<sup>26</sup>

Following in the steps of his father, Melvin was equestrian director on Sparks in 1921 and 1922.

On April 19, 1923, Orrin's wife died at her home in Omaha, Nebraska. Besides Orrin, who was trav-



elling on Sparks Circus that year, she was survived by a sister, Mrs. Emma Metcalf of Council Bluffs, Iowa.

The following year, Orrin, Melvin and Bessie were together on a circus for the last time. They were all on Gentry Patterson where Orrin was equestrian director and Melvin and Bessie had a riding and carrying act as well as their individual principal bareback acts.<sup>27</sup>

Orrin was off the road in 1925, being involved in a clothing business in Racine, Wisconsin. Probably the last circus that he ever saw was Christy Bros. Circus when it played Kenosha that year.<sup>28</sup>

On February 23, 1926 Orrin died of liver, heart and lung complications at St. Vincent's Hospital in Toledo.<sup>29</sup> He was interred at Ravine Cemetery in Sylvania, Ohio. His survivors were his widow, Florence; sons, Melvin and Orrin, Jr.; a step-daughter, Olga; and his sister, Mrs. Ella Davenport. Orrin Hollis, Jr. was never part of the circus profession.

Melvin was at Detroit playing the Eagles' Indoor Circus with his riding act when he was informed of his father's critical illness. He left immediately after a performance for Toledo, but he arrived too late.

In his *Billboard* obituary, it was stated: "Mr. Hollis was to the white tops what Booth and Barrett were to the drama and he was considered by circus people the last, with the exception of Robert Stickney, Jr., of the greatest riding team of all time--William Showles, Charles W. Fish,

Orrin "Pop" Hollis on Gentry Bros. in 1924. Pfening Archives.



Romeo Sebastian, Robert Stickney and Orrin Hollis. He was the uncle of Orrin, Albert (Stick), Louise (Lulu), John and May Davenport and numbered P. T. Barnum among his closest friends."

In addition to joining the J. W. Norman Circus (Norman E. Beck and Thomas E. Berry) at Flint Michigan in February of 1925, the riding Hollis Troupe also appeared on the St. Louis Police Circus and the Columbus, Ohio Shrine show<sup>30</sup> that spring. The St. Louis Police Circus featured the Joe Hodgini Troupe of equestrians as well as the Hollis Troupe. Madame Bedini and Sir Victor also showed their troupe of twelve liberty horses, the best managed in the country. At Columbus the bareback riders included Fred Derrick and Madame Le Tour as well as Melvin.

The 1926 Walter L. Main program featured the principal acts of Melvin and Bessie and the carrying act of the Hollis troupe. Melvin also directed a group of liberty ponies. The riding Hobsons were also on this show of which Floyd and Howard King were the proprietors.<sup>31</sup>

The artistry of Melvin and Bessie was well characterized in a letter dated July 8, 1928 to Melvin in care of the Main Circus at Putnam, Connecticut by George A. Hough: "Before the more vivid memories of our Brockton visit vanish I want to compliment you upon your riding last night. I recognized the bad conditions before Bessie spoke of them, nevertheless, it seemed to me I never saw you ride better. Your somersault reminded me of your dad when I was a small boy and he was the Top Rider of Them All.

"Your wife was going good too. Bessie was the real Beauty of The Big Top. Both Mr. and Mrs. Hough, Jr. concurred with my judgment that she was a charming figure and most attractive in all her appearance. She ought to have some really good photographs. They would be certain to go across on the big time with rotogravure editors."

Melvin's partial response of August 10, 1926 was as follows: "I am very pleased to note that you are running a picture of Bessie in the rotogravure section and do send me some as I know how she will be pleased and kindly accept my personal thanks for same. Mrs. King and Mr. Bradley wish to be remembered to you."

The King brothers also owned the of Gentry Bros. Circus in 1927,

a show that would feature the Hollis riding duo as well as the principal acts of Bessie and Melvin.<sup>32</sup>

The Hollis-McCree troupe, made up of Reno and Isabel McCree with Melvin and Bessie, was in existence for three seasons beginning in 1928 on Sparks Circus. This was the last year the twenty car show was under the control of Charles and Clifton Sparks. The troupe continued for the next two seasons on John Robinson's Circus. It opened in 1930 on the Sells-Floto Circus at the Chicago Stadium (May 29th until April 16th) and then transferred to John Robinson's Circus. It offered both straight and comic riding. That year it also appeared on the Zuhrah (Minneapolis) Temple Shrine circus.<sup>33</sup>

The clever clowning in the Hollis-McCree act was done by Reno McCree, Jr. in a style *a la* Poodles Hanneford. Reno was the son of Reno McCree, Sr. and Blanche Reed. He had been in the terrible Hagenbeck-Wallace train wreck in 1918 where he suffered an injury that led him to turn to clown riding. He had starred on Ringling Bros. from 1914 through 1917 in the McCree-Davenport riding act and was there in 1916 when his father dropped dead as he stepped from the circus ring.

In the fall of 1916 Reno and Melvin had planned a joint riding act for 1917, but it did not come to fruition. In 1928 their comedy act where Melvin rode straight and McCree was featured as "America's Premier Riding Comedian." Although several horses were always used in a "family" riding act, at the conclusion

Bessie and Pinky Hollis on Gentry Bros. in 1924. Pfening Archives.







it was traditional for all or most of the performers to mount one horse to be carried from the ring. The clown inevitably took his position at the tail end where he held on precariously.

This act was very well received as was the principal riding of both Bessie and Isabel. Melvin Hollis also rode his usual high quality principal somersault act. In 1930 he was doing three somersaults in one circle of the ring.

Following the 1930 season these two families went their separate ways. The McCrees were on the Dutton Circus in 1931 where Reno did comedy riding, leaping and tumbling and Isabel was in the equestrian revue and did a principal act. In 1932 McCree was on Sells-Floto and in 1934 on Gorman Bros. where a knee injury ended his riding career. He then turned to full time clowning. In 1934 Isabel was with the George Hanneford Troupe of riders on Downie Bros. Circus.

Melvin Hollis and his wife did an equestrian carrying act on Lewis Bros. Circus in 1931.<sup>34</sup> He also did his principal act with somersaults and managed the riding school mechanic. Bessie worked on the single trapeze and the Spanish web.

In February of 1932 Melvin and Bessie, then at Tampa, Florida, disposed of their riding act. They had perfected a couple of rigging acts and also planned a two person trampoline turn. Bessie also did muscle grind revolves. They appeared at Florida fairs during the winter and early spring and planned to play fairs elsewhere during the entire season. In November and December at the Lewis Bros. Indoor Circus<sup>35</sup> they presented their dual tram-

Melvin and Bessie Hollis; Alice Shon (not a part of the act); Isabel and Reno McCree, Jr. on Sparks Circus in 1928. Pfening Archives.

poline number and Bessie worked on the single trapeze and did her muscle grinds.

For the seasons of 1933 through early 1935<sup>36</sup> Bessie and Melvin played Shrine and Grotto circuses, for example the Al Sirat Grotto Circus in Cleveland for all three years, and the Moslem Temple Shrine Circus in Detroit for the latter two. Mostly they presented such acts as the cloud swing, Bessie's muscle grinds, small aerial numbers and Melvin's clowning.

Melvin and Bessie came back in 1935<sup>37</sup> with their Hollis troupe of riders. It was made up of Bessie Hollis, Helene Rogers, Flo McIntosh, Pat Knight and Melvin as clown. This excellent comedy riding number appeared on Barnett Bros. Circus that year. In addition Melvin and Bessie did creditable principal riding acts in rings 1 and 3, respectively. Melvin also served as equestrian director for the show and Bessie, along with Georgie Lake, did the muscle grinds. Pat Knight and the Misses McIntosh and Rogers performed on the wire. Pat Knight also did a back footslide from the top of the tent and he never failed to thrill the audience.

In 1935 Barnett Bros. opened with a 120 and three-50's big top. Their considerable menagerie was housed in a 70 and three-40's. By September business had declined to the point where the show was cut in size at Flora, Illinois and some of the trucks and equipment including the big top were sent back to winter quarters. The circus performance was then presented in the menagerie tent and

the menagerie animals were housed with the sideshow.

Bessie Hollis continued her aerial acts on the James M. Cole Circus in 1936 and her husband was the equestrian director. The next year the Hollises were on the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus.<sup>38</sup> Melvin was in clown alley for the Chicago date, working under Joe Coyle, the producing clown. Martha Joyce and Bessie Hollis were there doing their muscle grinds.

In 1938 the *Billboard* published a review of the Cole Bros. Circus opening program at the Chicago Stadium. The equestrian presentations were described in this fashion: "Plenty of good horse routines in the circus were led by Jorgen Christiansen, who has a stand-out liberty horse act near the finale. He uses 24 horses in a bang-up liberty routine. Dorothy Herbert is the leading equestrienne with a jumping and riding exhibition. There was bareback riding by other ladies Bessie Hollis, Rose Wallett and Juanita Hobson. For bareback troupes, all consistent entertainers, there were the Hollis troupe, the Aurelia family and the Hobson troupe. These acts have fallen into a set routine, including standard comics."

Quoting further, there was also a "flock of acrobatic turns on the bill, doing regulation risley work, tumbling, teeter-board, juggling and balancing. These included such acts as the La Mar Trio, the Hollis Troupe and the Belle Trio."

In 1940 Melvin and Bessie Hollis were with the Funland Shows carnival where she presented her high act. On the Al Sirat Grotto Circus that year they worked as a comedy acrobatic team. They also had a number of night club engagements including one at the Cat & Fiddle in Cincinnati.<sup>39</sup> Melvin and Bessie opened on the Orrin Davenport circus in Cleveland on February 3, 1941. The next year they worked indoor dates for Jack Patterson in Mansfield and Galion, Ohio.<sup>40</sup>

On September 3, 1949 Melvin Hollis passed away at Robinwood Hospital in Toledo. He was buried the next day in Sylvania, Ohio. He was survived by his widow who two years later married Walter Guice.<sup>41</sup>

Walter Guice's wife, Flora Bedini (1890-1950), had died on February 3, 1950 of a cerebral hemorrhage.<sup>42</sup> She was a member of the Bedini family riding act as early as 1903. She married Walter in 1908 and performed as a principal bareback rider for





The Hollis-McCree riding act on John Robinson in 1930. L to R Rudy Rudynoff, Bessie Hollis, Alice Shon, Isobel McCree, Melvin Hollis and Reno McCree on ground. Circus World Museum collection.

many years. Walter was a truly greacomey aerial bar performer and afine rider. In 1923 Flora and her husband, along with Melvin and Bessie Hollis, put together the big riding act on Sparks Circus. The Guices were very good friends of Melvin and Bessie.

After his marriage to Bessie, Walter Guice confined his professional activities to clowning on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey until 1965 when he retired.

#### NOTES

1. J. D. Draper, "The Davenport Family of Riders," *Bandwagon*, November-December 1990, pp. 22-29.
2. C. G. Sturtevant *Who's Who in the American Circus*, 1934; John O'Brien Circus hand written route diary, 1877, Pfening Archives; Sells Bros. Circus route book, 1878 (all primary sources are from Circus World Museum collection unless otherwise noted); *Bannerline*, March 1, 1962.
3. P. T. Barnum Circus newspaper ad, 1880; *New York Clipper*, April 16, 1881, p. 54; June 16, 1888, p. 219; August 23, 1890, p. 373; August 24, 1889, pp. 389, 393; April 27, 1889, p. 113; Adam Forepaugh Circus program, 1889; Sells Bros. Circus program, route book, 1883; Sturtevant, *op. cit.*; Barnum & London Circus programs, 1884-1887; *New York Clipper*, September 26, 1885, p. 437; August 7, 1886, p. 328; March 19, 1887, p. 6;

*White Tops*, May-June 1929, p. 6.

4. *New York Clipper*, September 28, 1889, p. 478; June 22, 1889, p. 238; August 24, 1889, p. 389.

5. *Ibid.*, October 4, 1890, p. 468.

6. John Robinson Circus program, 1891; John Robinson Circus route book, 1892; *New York Clipper*, July 4, 1891, p. 284; May 27, 1893, p. 284; June 16, 1888, p. 219.

7. Ringing Bros. Circus programs, 1894-1895; *New York Clipper*, April 11, 1896, p. 86; *Billboard*, May 3, 1902, p. 5; April 25, 1903, p. 4; May 2, 1903; February 26, 1921, p. 67; Great Wallace route book, 1904.

8. *Billboard*, August 15, 1903, p. 9; September 5, 1903.

9. *Ibid.*, October 22, 1904, p. 41.

10. *Ibid.*, May 19, 1906, p. 36; Sun Bros. Circus newspaper ad, 1906.

11. *Bannerline*, July 15, 1953, pp. 6-8.

12. *Billboard*, August 31, 1907, p. 22; April 23, 1910, p. 21; *New York Clipper*, June 6, 1908, p. 422; May 1, 1909, p. 310; August 21, 1909, p. 710; Campbell Bros. Circus programs, 1908 and 1910; Sturtevant, *op. cit.*

13. *Billboard*, March 12, 1910, p. 18.

14. *Ibid.*, June 15, 1912, p. 23.

15. *Circus Report*, June 26, 1972, p. 5; *Billboard*, March 1, 1913, p. 23; Orrin Hollis and son contract with Downie and Wheeler Circus, December 17, 1912.

16. *Billboard*, January 10, 1914, p. 29; *Bannerline*, July 15, 1953, pp. 6-8.

17. *Billboard*, May 13, 1916, pp. 24, 49; March 18, 1916, p. 114.

18. George Chindahl papers, Circus World Museum.

19. Sparks Circus route book, 1917; *Billboard*, April 7, 1917, p. 30.

20. *Billboard*, March 9, 1918; May

11, 1918; October 12, 1918, p. 24.

21. *Ibid.*, March 23, 1918, p. 160.

22. *New York Clipper*, August 7, 1886, p. 328; September 5, 1885, p. 391.

23. Walter L. Main Circus route book, 1919; Sparks Circus route book, 1919; *Billboard*, February 22, 1919.

24. Sparks Circus route books, 1920-1923; *Billboard*, April 10, 1920, p. 88; July 10, 1920; August 5, 1922; January 13, 1923; January 20, 1923, p. 77; June 11, 1921, p. 51.

25. *New York Clipper*, April 9, 1887, p. 52; August 2, 1890, p. 323.

26. *Billboard*, April 7, 1923; January 13, 1923, p. 125; January 20, 1923, p. 77; December 18, 1920; August 5, 1922.

27. *Ibid.*, May 5, 1923, p. 114; Gentry-Patterson Circus route book, program, herald, 1924.

28. *Billboard*, May 30, 1925, p. 70.

29. *Ibid.*, March 6, 1926, p. 90.

30. *Ibid.*, February 7, 1925, p. 94; April 4, 1925, p. 106; May 9, 1925, p. 94.

31. *Ibid.*, April 10, 1926, p. 62; May 1, 1926, p. 60; August 7, 1926, pp. 62, 67.

32. *Ibid.*, April 30, 1927; November 5, 1927, p. 62; Gentry Bros. Circus route book, 1927.

33. Sparks Circus herald, 1928; John Robinson Circus program, 1930; Sells Floto Circus program, 1930; *White Tops*, February 1928, p. 3; May 1928; April 1929; May 1930; *Billboard*, June 2, 1928, pp. 58, 84; June 6, 1929, p. 52; December 21, 1929, p. 72; February 8, 1930, p. 70; May 24, 1930, p. 90.

34. *Billboard*, May 30, 1931, pp. 44, 84.

35. *Ibid.*, February 27, 1932; April 2, 1932, p. 28; November 12, 1932; December 24, 1932.

36. Al Sirat Grotto Circus programs, 1933, 1935; *Billboard*, January 13, 1934, p. 28; February 3, 1934, p. 28; February 24, 1934, p. 29; February 16, 1935, pp. 38, 56.

37. *Billboard*, April 20, 1935, p. 39; September 7, 1935, p. 33; September 14, 1935, pp. 30, 33; *White Tops*, May 1935; Barnett Bros. Circus program, 1935.

38. James M. Cole Circus program, 1936; Chindahl papers; Hagenbeck-Wallace program, 1937 Chicago engagement; *Billboard*, April 17, 1937, pp. 36, 43; April 24, 1937, p. 41; *White Tops*, November-December 1968, p. 13.

39. Al Sirat Grotto Circus program, 1940; *Billboard*, March 16, 1940, p. 34.

40. *Billboard*, April 4, 1942, p. 38.

41. *Ibid.*, September 17, 1949, p. 47; January 7, 1950; *Bandwagon*, March-April 1963, p. 11.

42. *Billboard*, February 11, 1950, p. 53.



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The circus performer has from the earliest days of the genre been a person of many talents. Any and all of them were riders, tumblers and leapers. Some, of course, were better than others at some tasks, and so specialized at those turns. A circus roster was a pool of talent from which the best at each specialty was given that spot on the program as the need arose.

Every performer was expected to appear in the "ground and lofty tumbling," as an example. The least talented would drop away as the feats became more difficult, but everyone could at least appear in the cartwheel and somersault portion of such an act.

We read of several instances where a performer left a show for one reason or another, and someone else was substituted. This doesn't mean that the fit was perfect. Hugh Lindsay admitted that he was a failure when he first substituted for an absent clown on John Miller's circus in the 1820's. Pete Conklin was dragged into a similar position when Tony Pastor left the Mabie show in 1859. These examples are listed to illustrate that the absence, through injury or other cause, of a featured performer didn't mean that the circus did without that specialty.

Nor do we mean to say that everyone's talents were completely used by the managers. There were those who could adequately perform at what we'll call stage or hall show turns, such as singing, dancing and comedy that ordinarily was not considered a part of a circus performance. Circuses playing small towns in the 1830's and thereafter usually gave but one performance, and that in the afternoon. Rural audiences were early-risers and did not, as a rule, attend night performances. Because of this, the performers were unoccupied after four or five o'clock until time to leave for the next town in the morning. It was not unusual for a group to band together and present a hall show in the village at night splitting the proceeds between them. As the practice became prevalent, it came to the attention of managers that here

## The History Of The CONCERT OR AFTER-SHOW

BY STUART TRAYER

were talents they could make use of in their show.

There was a precedent for this in the common appearance of some performers in both the side show and the main tent. Side show minstrels were often clowns in the circus. Two of the better known men to appear in blackface in the side show and do the circus' clowning in the ring were Dan Rice and Tony Pastor.

Side shows were not necessarily available as second venues to circus performers as time went on, for privilege men increasingly ran the side shows, and they hired their own features. Thus, the concert or after-show became a way of exposing the non-ring talents of people on the circus payroll. It also provided a means for the managers to extract a few more dimes and quarters from people

Tearing down the seats while a concert is in progress. Author's collection.



already seated in the arena. In time outside performers, that is, persons who appeared only in the concert, came to be hired.

We cannot, with accuracy, point out the first concert. This is because the references are vague. For example, a

minstrel troupe might be announced by the show, but the advertisements would not specify if they appeared in the regular performance, a side show, or the concert. The reason for this seems clear; there was no sense in announcing that the public would have to pay extra to see the act.

Silas Robinson, son of Yankee Robinson, wrote in the April 23, 1892 *New York Clipper* that the after-concert was not known in 1857, but his report can hardly be classified as a contemporary reference.

Gilbert Robinson in his book *Old Wagon Show Days* (Cincinnati, 1925) provides rosters of the John Robinson Circus in the appendix. Presumably, he used old programs for his source. He first lists the concert performers in 1857.

There is a contemporary source for an 1857 concert, an advertisement for the Hiram Orton show in the *Fayetteville Observer* (North Carolina) for June 25, of that year. The notice says that a minstrel troupe, Lewis and Lindsey's Sable Harmonists, will perform after the circus in the same tent for an additional charge of twenty-five cents. This announcement was repeated throughout that season's advertising and in 1860 as well.

William S. Davis, in a series of letters to the *New York Clipper* in 1892, in which he gave the history of the first cookhouse on a circus, also mentioned Mabie's first concert. He wrote: "As to the concert, all I may say is that we (Mabie's Menagerie and Circus) went south again in the fall. In December, 1858 I put the concert under the big tent, and charged ten cents extra and found it a good thing. I kept it there when Mr. Mabie came on and met us at Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He came right from New York, where he spent most of his time, and where were headquarters of all the showmen at that time. He had never heard of such a thing being done, and was very much



surprised to think I dared to do it. He wanted me to stop it, saying we would be 'torn all to pieces,' but I did not stop it. The next season we heard of Orton & Older and others doing it."

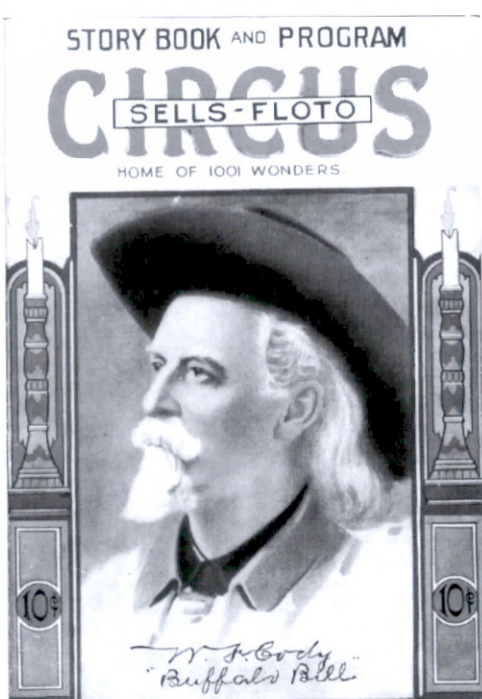
We also find James Esler in the February 13, 1892 *Clipper* speaking of 1857 on the Mabie show: "All of the concert performances were outside of the tent. (He is referring to side-shows here.) I left the company in August, 1857, and joined Nixon & Kemp's Circus, when I there first heard an inside concert for money."

In the same series of letters in 1892, George S. Cole wrote that "Orton & Older gave concerts in the circus tent in 1858."

All this would seem to date the introduction of the concert in 1857, on Orton & Older, and on Nixon & Kemp. Those who specified 1858 may not have been aware of what was happening on other circuses, and most of these commentators were speaking thirty-five years after the events, thus their dating may have been in error.

One of the earliest contemporary references we have found to the existence of after-shows is in a review of Dan Castello's Great Show in the August 11, 1866 *Clipper*. Correspondent "Chip" wrote from Savannah, Georgia that "The minstrel band, under the direction of Tim Woodruff, is decidedly the best I ever saw with a circus. They perform immediately after the circus performance, under the same pavilion."

To illustrate the popularity of this addition to the traditional circus form, we turn to Hugh Coyle's memoir of what he mistakenly identified as the first concert ever given. His description in the April 28, 1906 *Billboard* tells of the Gardner & Hemmings Circus of 1862, in which he was a musician. At Oil City, Pennsylvania, Gardner agreed to hire a stranded minstrel company. For some unstated reason, the minstrels couldn't appear in the side show (perhaps the side show was owned by a privilege man), so it was decided to have them appear in the main tent after the circus performance. But what to call them? Coyle says over fifty suggestions were made and rejected until Lew Simmons, leader of the minstrels, came up with "concert." A most revealing statement in Coyle's article is that the charge for the concert was set at twenty-five cents, and that over two-thirds of the original circus audience stayed to see it.



The first wild west concert was on Sells-Floto in 1914 when the show featured an elderly William F. Cody. Pfening Archives.

In a search for the content of concerts, we found that minstrel shows were the overwhelming choice in the earliest offerings, but gradually the variety show (also known as *olios*, and later as *vaudeville*) came to the fore. Jig dancers, singers of comic songs, instrumentalists and comedians were some of the acts. We would guess that the dependence on "freaks" (fat people, thin people, tattooed people, etc.) in the side show rose as *vaudeville*-types moved into the concert.

For reasons unknown to us, it wasn't until 1869 that the *New York Clipper* began to list the concert privilege men in the rosters they printed. It may have had something to do with the system by which the names of attaches were gathered. Even then, they very seldom disclosed the names of the concert performers. We can understand this last omission if we realize that the privilege men were known at the beginning of the season, but the performers may not have been contracted that early. Also, if the circus contracted the concert to a third party, the managers might not know whom the privilege men intended to hire.

As to the names of the privilege men, finding them in the *Clipper* is of no particular assistance in determining their careers, as few of them repeated the exercise, or so it

seems to the researcher. A few well-known names do appear. Batcheller & Doris had the concert on "Pogey" O'Brien's circus in 1871 and 1872. J. M. Chandler had the privilege with P. A. Older in 1871. He was later the show's press agent, and in 1873 Older's partner in the ill-fated Barnum lease. James A. Bailey and his partner, George Middleton, had both a side show and the concert with James Cooper's 1872 company.

As time passed, more and more concert managers also had other positions with the circus. The rider James DeMott did this with several O'Brien shows. John Robinson was a great one to grant the privilege to one or another of his managers. It must of been used as a way to attract certain persons to the roster.

Tickets for the concert were originally sold by candy butchers; our earliest reference to this practice is dated 1874. Eventually the task was given to the ushers. This had to be large-show practice, as the usher corps needed to be sizable to get the job done. A certain number of customers would decide at the last minute to stay for the after-show and so pay cash instead of buying a ticket. The ushers were allowed to keep this money; they referred to it as "lunch money" in the 1930's.

In 1879 James T. Powers, later a well-known actor, was a member of the Van Amburgh four person concert, a song and dance team. In his memoir, *Twinkle Little Star* (New York 1939), he tells us that they were paid ten dollars per week each, and 10% of concert sales. They sold the concert tickets, as well as ten-cent songsters themselves. An interesting aside is that he says that the sideshow and concert people had their own cook tent.

Another revealing glimpse of concert management is in the Pawnee Bill route book of 1898. Edmund G. Smith, an old trouper who started with the Sands, Quick circus in 1853, visited the show and some of his remarks were noted. He was with Dan Rice when Rice first attempted an after-show. He said that clearing the tent in order to present the concert always gave trouble, and invariably resulted in a few controversies. It was a couple of years before it became customary.

Concerts were variety shows until they were replaced by wild west shows in the twentieth century. However, wild west shows came on the scene much earlier, beginning with the Buffalo Bill Wild West and





## THE SELLS FLOTO CIRCUS

PRESENTS

### TOM MIX (IN PERSON)

With Tony, His Wonder Horse

THE ENTIRE WILD WEST EXHIBITION TAKING PLACE IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE BIG SHOW IS OVER IS UNDER THE PERSONAL DIRECTION OF TOM MIX. TOM MIX positively appears IN PERSON at each and every WILD WEST EXHIBITION, with TONY, his Wonder Horse. TOM MIX takes an active part in each and every performance in addition to directing HIS COMPANY OF STAR PERFORMERS. Each person in TOM MIX'S COMPANY OF WILD WEST STARS is a champion in his class—direct from the Studios of HOLLYWOOD.

#### PROGRAM OF THE WILD WEST EXHIBITION

Under personal direction of TOM MIX

##### Display No. 1

The introductory line-up of Tom Mix, Tony, and the Famous Company of Tom Mix Real Wild West Stars, each a Champion.

##### Display No. 2

Meet the World's Greatest and Ideal Cowboy—the Inimitable TOM MIX, himself, in person, and his Wonder Horse—Tony, the Magnificent.

##### Display No. 3

Tom Mix presents for your approval the FAMOUS PONY EXPRESS of the old days of the Golden West, before the advent of the steam engine. The Famous Tom Mix Company will portray to you in realistic manner how the U. S. Mail was carried thru the hostile Indian country, over plains, mountains, thru storms and cyclones—with ever the one and only thought, "Nothing can stop the U. S. Mail."

##### Display No. 4

TOM MIX and HIS FAMOUS COMPANY OF EXPERT ROPERS, among whom are HANK DURNELL, FRANK GUSKY, and COLORADO COTTON, will now mystify you with the diversified uses to which a lariat can be attributed. Expert lassoing, rope dancing, big horse catches, rope spinning all played before your eyes in the only way that Champions of Champions can display it.

##### Display No. 5

TOM MIX himself now takes great personal pleasure in presenting to you his famous company of

trained horses, raised and trained on the Famous TOM MIX RANCH in CALIFORNIA. These horses, known as THE BREWERY EQUINES, are acknowledged as the most famous of their kind in the entire world. These horses are now being introduced for the first time—as Mr. Mix took great personal pride and care in the rearing of these horses—and personally has cared for them since their colthood days; this being one of his very few pleasures. A man in love with horses—and now you see the GREAT PALS together.

##### Display No. 6

TOM MIX'S FAMOUS COMPANY OF TRICK AND FANCY RIDERS, led by TOM MIX, himself, will now show you the expert feats of horsemanship displayed before your eyes in flesh and blood that heretofore you have only seen on the silver screen in your picture show. These riders delight in contending with each other and seeing which one can be the most daring. WATCH THEM!

##### Display No. 7

TOM MIX and COMPANY now present for your approval, HARD RIDING COWBOYS riding MAN KILLING OUTLAW HORSES. All horses brought from the FAR WEST under the personal supervision of TOM MIX—each having been tried and proven to be a MAN KILLER before being added to the company of OUTLAW HORSES. LET 'ER BUCK! WHOOPEE!

Please retain this program until the concert.

TICKETS  
10c

## WAIT FOR THE COLOSSAL FRONTIER DAY EXHIBITION

30 Minutes In The Golden West

Sensational Wild West and Rodeo Round-up presented by the foremost champions of the great frontier and wild west exhibition of the western plains and Northwestern Canada. You will witness an unparalleled assembly of the world's greatest exponents of bucking horses, bronco riding, roping by master cowboys and cow girls—the woolly west presented to you in miniature form, headed by the fearless champion Jack Wolf, Powder River, Wyoming.

AND

## BIG HOLLYWOOD GIRL REVUE

TICKETS  
10c

moving it into the concert position for 1930 and 1931.

When the new Cole Bros.-Clyde Beatty Circus opened in Chicago in 1935 it presented a musical review-vaudeville show with a choir line of girl dancers as the concert. This did not go over. When the circus went on the road the after-show became "The Colossal Frontier Day Exhibition, 30 Minutes in the Golden West,"

The Al G. Barnes Circus advertised their 10 cent concert in the 1936 program. Pfening Archives.

the like were hired as concert features throughout the period. Silent movie cowboy Jack Hoxie appeared as a concert feature with more circuses than any other Hollywood star.

The movie cowboys rode into the big top during several concert announcements during the performance. It was also noted that all those holding concert tickets could move to the center grandstand chairs to view the presentation. This allowed the bleacher boards and star-backed seats to start being removed after the night show, while the concert continued.

In most cases the movie cowboys appeared with other wild west people hired by the circus. This was not the case when Ringling-Barnum hired Col. Tim McCoy in 1935. McCoy hired his own people and was paid for the complete presentation. In 1937 his after-show consisted of eleven or twelve cowboys and girls, ten Indians and seven cossack riders. McCoy's after-show was so successful it convinced him that the country was again ready for a full-blown wild west show ala Buffalo Bill. He was wrong; his 1938 show lasted only a few weeks.

Some western stars, Mix, Maynard, Hoxie and Jones for example, headed their own circuses. Television decreased the novelty of the variety show type of concert. Cowboy movies went into decline, as well, possibly another victim of the tube. By contrast, as late as the 1950's William Boyd's "Hopalong Cassidy" character, revived on television, was featured in circus after-shows. But he was one of several exceptions. Generally, the concert faded, as had the side show and the minstrels and the street parade, and as will the menagerie in all likelihood. Only the ring performance survives, the original and the basic circus.

The back of a one page insert in the 1929 Sells-Floto Circus program advertising the Tom Mix after-show. Pfening Archives.

Rough Riders of 1883. Surprisingly, the first wild west presentation in a circus was presented in that same year. On March 24, in Madison Square Garden, Barnum & Bailey began their program with a cowboy act, a rodeo-like scene.

In the next season, 1884, Adam Forepaugh started his program with a large wild west contingent very similar to Buffalo Bill's program, with cowboys, Indians, stagecoach robberies, and so forth. Buffalo Bill himself starred in what appears to have been the first wild west concert, on Sells-Floto in 1914 and 1915. In 1916 the Floto show featured boxwe Jess Willard and wrestler Frank Gotch in their after-show.

The Ringling brothers added cowboy presentations in the 1920's, but they were part of the regular circus program. In 1924 they moved these features to the concert. Similarly, Hagenbeck & Wallace had their wild west as part of the regular program in 1929,

headed by long-time circus cowboy Jimmy Foster.

Begun, as we said, with Buffalo Bill's Wild West, in the 1880's the enormous popularity of motion pictures with cowboy themes in the 1920's revived the after-show use of western themes. Such movie stars as Tom Mix, Ken Maynard, Buck Jones, Hoot Gibson and Tim McCoy, and

The Ken Maynard after-show was advertised in the 1937 Cole Bros. program. Pfening Archives.

## KEN MAYNARD

TICKETS  
25c

### AND HIS SUPER COLOSSAL FRONTIER DAY EXHIBITION

30 Minutes In The Golden West

TICKETS  
25c

Sensational Wild West and Rodeo Round-up presented by the foremost champions of the great frontier and wild west exhibition of the western plains and Northwestern Canada. You will witness an unparalleled assembly of the world's greatest exponents of bucking horses, bronco riding, roping by master cowboys and cowgirls—the woolly west brought to you by the fearless champions, and over 100 moving pictures.

Mabel Hornett  
Estelle Jones  
Mary Downing  
Christine Elder  
Albert Jones  
Cecil Tatum  
Alice Foster

Wild Bill And  
Estelle Clark  
Pete Jenkins  
Lass Chance Sam  
Estelle Tatum  
Edward Hornett  
Billy Pickens

Earl Downing  
Frank Gilbreath  
Al Stevens  
Sullivan Shkinnoff  
Pierre Crispinski  
Ralph Clark  
Miles City Joe

### 24 SIOUX INDIANS FROM PINE RIDGE, S. D.

KEN MAYNARD  
Champion Rifle Shot and Roper  
CHIEF GEO. WASHINGTON  
Archery Wizard  
JERRY & BARBARA BARDLE  
Juvenile Rope Spinners

SIOUX INDIANS  
In Native Dances

DEPEND ON THIS CIRCUS TO ALWAYS BE FIRST IN ITS CONQUEST FOR NOVELTIES

THE GREATEST INDIAN  
Riding Act in the World

MISS ROSE DAVIS  
World Acclaimed Bucking Horse Rider  
RUSSIAN PASTORAL DANCES

Together With a Congress of  
CHAMPION COWBOYS & COWGIRLS  
In a Thrilling Roping Contest



While doing research in the circus archives at the Ringling Museum, the editors came across this manuscript tribute to Jess Adkins, co-owner of the Cole Bros. Circus. At the top of the typescript's first page, McKennon had hand written: "This first draft was written the night he died in 1940 in my state-room on the Beckman and Gerity Carnival. Never did rewrite it." It is presented here with slight revisions with permission of the Ringling Museum and the author.

# BIG JESS ADKINS

By Joseph W. McKennon

Big Jess was a product of an era called by many circus historians, "the Golden Age of the Circus." In any other period, or in any other business, a man like Jess Adkins could not have developed. He was a circus man. He made no pretense of ever being anything else. A few years before his death, while trying to secure funds for a show of his own, he stated this fact clear and simply. He was talking to a group of bankers and businessmen from whom he hoped to secure aid for his venture. "Gentlemen," he said, "I am a circus man. I have never been anything else, and I have never had any desire to be in any other business. I was content to manage a show for someone else, but now they have closed that show. There are no other shows for me to manage, and out of the circus business, I would wither and die like a limb torn from a tree. Therefore, gentlemen, I have no other alternative. I must start a show of my own." The loan was granted, and he had his own circus.

Jess, like most showmen of his period, had himself on exhibition at all times, not as a performer or kinker;

Jess Adkins, front left, on Howe's Great London Circus in 1921. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives.



Jess Adkins 1886-1940. Pfening Archives.

but as a successful circus executive with his contempt for the common way of life as enjoyed by the average sucker. It is doubtful that he ever had any ambition to be a performer. He never ceased his labors as Ringing show cookhouse bread boy to go outside and stand on his head as the other flunkies did. He didn't want to make the towners think he was a kinker. Nevertheless, until the day of his death, he was on exhibition at all times. As soon as he had worked his way up to a job in "the wagon," he began to dress the part of a circus executive. His showy dress set off his big body to perfection. His large white hats, his loud patterned suits, his big rings, and his long-toed, custom built shoes were all a part of him and his idea of how a showman should appear.

One of his many nicknames came from his mode of dress. Today, many men still speak of him as "the man with the turned up toes."

The following incident gives a true picture of the man. Early in his career, about 1903 or 1904, while slicing bread in the

Ringing cookhouse, he cut his finger badly. The teenage boy rushed to the croaker's tent tightly clutching the bleeding finger. The doctor was entertaining some friends under the awning of his tent. The boy rushed up to

him and asked for first aid. "Go away boy. Can't you see that I am busy." The doctor was as emphatic as he was pompous. The hurt boy went back to the cookhouse and bandaged his own finger. Over thirty years later, Jess was standing in the front door of his own circus. An elderly man approached him, and began to introduce himself. Adkins' wonderful memory of faces had instantly cataloged him, however. It was the doctor. After introducing himself, the doctor said, "I have a party with me, Mr. Adkins. Could you take care of us?" The big man made no comment. He just went to the exchange desk and picked some of the best seats in the house for the doctor and his party. In addition he gave them an order for dinner in the cookhouse after the show. Not one sign of recognition, nor one word about the cut finger.

Many show hands never liked Jess. "He is a slugging so and so." "He is crooked and his word is not to be trusted." Such comments were often made by his enemies. We have to admit that he did slug lots of men, but so did all the other old-time show owners and managers. Adkins was forced to slug many men because of

Adkins and daughter on Gentry Bros. Circus in 1926.

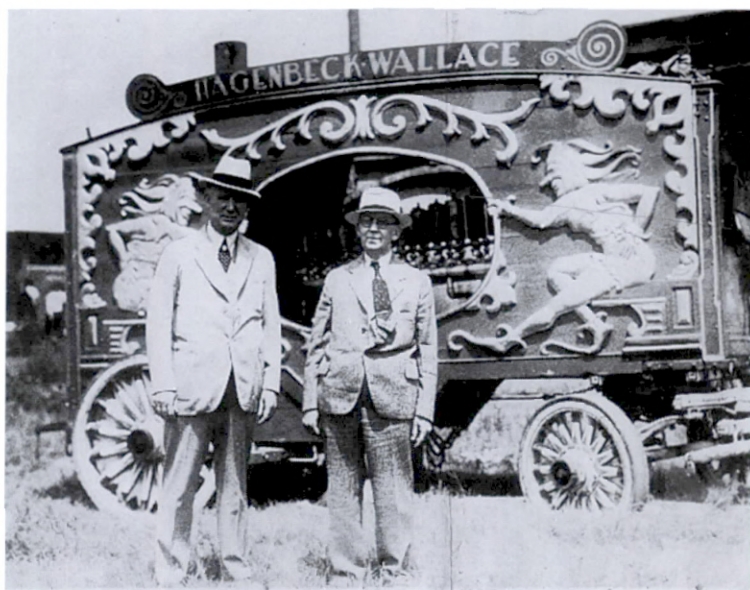




his own large size. It is a tendency of small men to take advantage of large ones as they think, "That big so and so won't hit me as he knows everyone will be against him for hitting a smaller man." Jess did knock heads if pushed enough, but his temper was seldom stirred deeply. He never hit a man unless that man had it coming to him. He was more approachable than any of the other circus Governors, most of whom would slug a working man for just walking near the front end. Jess never did this. In fact, he encouraged the men to be familiar with him. A man who spoke of him as "Mr. Adkins" was distrusted by the other men. This man was "licking the bosses' boots," and in most cases the boot licker was also a stool pigeon. The boss wanted to be called Jess, so why should this bird be different unless he was a "wrong Gee."

Many staff members and key working men worked with and for him for over twenty years. That alone should prove that Jess was neither too hard on his men nor that his word could not be trusted as almost all his key men worked for years without any kind of written contract. They had Jess's word and that was all they needed. The few instances of his having to renege on a promise were caused by circumstances that could not be foreseen at the time the agreement was made. In these instances, Adkins always called the other party to the agreement to the wagon and gave a full explanation of why the change was necessary. He always took care to see that the other party got an adjustment that was completely satisfactory.

At those rare times when his temper did get the best of him, his rage was something to frighten anyone. At those times his bushy hair stood on its ends, his powerful neck swelled out over his tight collar, and his rugged face suffused with blood. There is no record of his venting his rage on anyone except



Adkins, on left, on the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus in 1934.

the object of his wrath, but everyone stayed away from him until the storm subsided. In 1931 the Hagenbeck-Wallace show was moving into Columbus, Ohio for a week at the Ohio State Fair. Jess had left an early call with his car porter the night before. That meant he was to be called upon arrival in town, but the porter over slept and the boss wasn't called. Two hours after the show got into town, Adkins was awakened by a member of his staff and told that a new group of Ohio politicians had taken over the fair and were trying to void the contract made with the circus by their predecessors. Had he been at their

Zack Terrell and Jess Adkins, owners of Cole Bros. Circus in 1935.



office at the time he had planned, this difficulty would not have arisen. His rage was the talk of the show for weeks. However, it was not directed at anyone except the car porter. He aroused everyone on the show train looking for the man. That gentleman had already made himself scarce. He moped away from the show without stopping to pick up any of his belongings, nor did he even kiss his wife good-bye. An hour later, Jess was on the lot fixing the difficulty and the show opened

on time as scheduled.

The big man was a great lover of children. It was one of the sorrows of his later life that he had had no child of his own. He was exceedingly fond of a step daughter, Helen, but she could not completely satisfy his longing for flesh of his own flesh. After he was in his fifties, he adopted a three year old boy, Bobby, on whom he bestowed all the pent up affection that a child-hungry foster parent could give. Jess had a love for children as children, and the show never played a town with an orphan's home without all the orphans being the guests of the manager. He always insisted on being the guide of the orphanage parties on their tours of the show grounds.

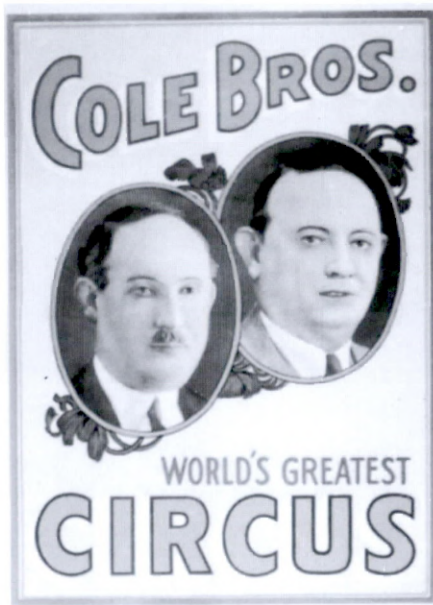
Jess never missed an opportunity to carry the thrills of the big top to those who otherwise would not be able to see them. Circus acts were always sent to children's hospitals. Inmates of all insane asylums, poor houses and other institutions for the care of unfortunates were always honored guests of the show. If their condition was such that they could not come to the grounds, the show was carried to them. Clowns, jugglers, wire walkers, dogs, ponies, and sometimes the elephants were sent to these institutions between shows in the afternoons. Only twice during his career as circus owner and manager did Jess fail to send a show



behind the walls in a penitentiary town. Those instances occurred after the prison riots at Columbus, Ohio and Joliet, Illinois, when the prisons were under restrictions. Jess was unhappy all day in Joliet because the officials would not let him send a show into the prison. As the circus grounds in that Illinois town are just outside the walls they were a constant reminder to him that there were people near that could not enjoy a circus that day.

Adkins' religion was the religion of mankind--and the circus. He did attend church, and he probably was a church member. There is no doubt that he did believe in a Supreme Being as he was high in Masonic circles. He also had a deep underlying belief in things of the occult and mystic. Two of his friends always gave him a horoscope for his birthday and he confessed that he followed its plan throughout the ensuing year. At times he did ignore the warnings of his chart, and in most cases, the results were disastrous for him. His over expansion of 1938, which cost him half of his circus empire, was warned against in his forecast for that year. The two friends [Here McKennon wrote in the left margin: "Probably why I didn't send this on to the *Billboard* that same week. I was one of the two friends.] did take advantage of his belief one year. They rewrote a horoscope which predicted marital discord, and changed it to a prediction of complete divorce from the lady. (She was a no good battle ax.) He did divorce her that year, but sufficient grounds for it had existed for several years.

Jess never had gone stale mentally had he lived for a hundred years. His interest in new things and new methods became greater as he grew older. He was vitally interested in many things outside the circus. He was a great fight and sports fan. During the winters, he took an active part in the civic affairs of the winter quarters' towns. He was a Rotarian, Mason, Elk and a member of the Chamber of Commerce; and he found time to be active in all of them. But his outstanding mental trait was his determination to learn something new each day. It was his motto that a day was not complete unless at least one new idea, process, or theory was learned.



Portrait litho of Adkins and Terrell used in 1935.

It was not uncommon for him to stop his car between the show train and lot, and spend half an hour watching some type of work being done. If nothing new to him was being done, he moved on. However, if a new machine or process was being used, he stayed and watched until he understood it. He never hesitated to ask questions about anything that he saw and did not understand.

Had the depression of the thirties not interfered, Jess would surely have realized his lifelong ambition of owning fifty elephants and a circus as big as the Ringlings. In spite of the business slump, he did have thirty nine bulls, and his show was almost as big as the Big One.

The depression gained him an

Mr. and Mrs. Jess Adkins in 1939. Pfening Archives.



other nickname, "Depression Jess." His enemies used this in a slurring way, but it was actually a compliment to his ability for he continued to operate at a profit after most of his competitors were forced to go to the barn. He was a master of economics, and he knew where to pare expenses when the going got too rough. No one was beaten in any way. It is true that salaries were low, but he kept eight hundred circus people employed who would have been forced on relief had he closed. Salaries for these people were as high as those paid by other businesses during the same period. He was an astute showman who had brains enough to continue operations in spite of adverse conditions.

Jess lived a full and active life and its end was as he probably would have wished it. It is doubtful that he ever gave any serious thought to his own death--he was always too busy--but if he did, he would have preferred it sudden. That was the way it came. The show was in Gardner, Massachusetts. It was an ideal circus day. The sun was shining brightly, the grass was green, and a nice matinee crowd was coming in. Jess was at his accustomed place in the connection back of the front door. It always gave him pleasure to watch the crowds as they entered the menagerie. The band in the big top began to play, and he thrilled as he always did to the throb of the drums under canvas. In twenty more minutes the house would be in and the show would be under way. Then he could rest, and come to think of it, he was sort of tired. He pulled his chair back of the side wall and sat down. One of the front door men nudged another, "Look! The Old Man must be tired, he is sitting down before the spec starts." Twenty minutes later, with a fanfare of trumpets, the opening spectacle entered the big top and the show started. The same front door man looked around again. "Hell's Bells," he exclaimed, "the man must be tired. This is the first time that he has failed to watch the spec this season." He walked over to Jess' chair. "Boss is there anything. . . . Say? Hey! !! Burkhart, the Gaffer is dead!" Big Jess had been called by the Big Gaffer above to join that illustrious troupe of circus men who had preceded him to their own particular Valhalla.



Neither the war nor the wreck of the *Black Squall* deterred James M. Nixon. For the tenting season of 1861, Sloat's New York Circus combined with Nixon's Royal Circus to form the First National Union Circus, advertising as "adapted to the exigencies of war." The "Car of Freedom," which led the parade, was drawn by ten horses under the rein of Madame Mason, clothed to resemble the Goddess of Liberty; and atop the car was a military band dressed in the familiar uniforms of Zouaves. The list of performers included Le Jeune, Burt, Signor Sebastian, the Nelson Brothers, the southern clown Sam Long and Ella Zoyara. Zoyara's mentor, Spencer Q. Stokes, was there as equestrian director with his thoroughbred war horse General Scott.<sup>1</sup> The show, which performed primarily in New Jersey and the New England states throughout the summer, moved onto the traditional South Fifth Street lot in Williamsburg in August before the tent was transported to New York City and pitched on the open grounds between the Palace Gardens concert pavilion and the Fourteenth Street Theatre, Fourteenth and Broadway.

The circus opened there on September 2, 1861, for an indefinite stay and remained until the scorn of fall weather pronounced the season's end. During the run, Grizzly Adam's bears performed their amazing acrobatics, Joe Pentland reappeared as clown, and Eaton Stone was there with his buffalos driven in harness. Signor Zoyara, now of the male gender, the same Zoyara who had previously created such controversy at Niblo's the year before, drew the journalistic comment, "We must say, however, that Zoyara makes a much better looking woman than man."<sup>2</sup> But the rider did not abandon the skirt for tights exclusively; later in the run he performed as he had for the public on his New York debut—dressed in the feminine frills of Mlle. Ella Zoyara.

Edwin Forrest was apparently still working under the Nixon ringmaster's whip. M. B. Leavitt, who called Nixon "the most enterprising showman I knew well in the Sixties," tells us Nixon opened the Boston Theatre season of 1861-62 with the great tragedian. Forrest appeared four nights a week alongside

# The Adventures of JAMES M. NIXON Forgotten Impresario

PART TWO  
By William L. Slout

a fine company that included John McCullough.<sup>3</sup>

In the spring of 1862, Nixon took a lease on the Palace Gardens. The

Newspaper ad used by Nixon and Sloat in 1861. Pfening Archives.

THE GREAT NORTHERN  
**PATRIOTIC EQUESTRIAN TROUPE.**  
New and Brilliant Organisation, adapted  
to the exigencies of the War.

Grand consolidation of  
**NIXON'S ROYAL CIRCUS,**  
Late of Niblo's Garden, N. Y.  
AND  
**SLOAT'S NEW YORK CIRCUS**  
Combined in one colossal exhibition, under the  
title of the  
**FIRST NATIONAL UNION CIRCUS.**



WILL PERFORM IN HARTFORD,  
**On Monday and Tuesday,**  
July 8th and 9th,  
AFTERNOON AND EVENING,  
Corner Market and Talcott streets.

Upon the day of exhibition, the company will enter  
town, preceded by a  
Grand Union Procession!!  
IN WHICH  
**MADAME MASON,**  
Late of Astley's, London, will drive a superb team of  
ten horses, before the magnificent Car of Freedom.  
Madame Mason will appear in the costume of  
The Goddess of Liberty.  
Attended by a full and magnificent Military Band,  
dressed in complete Zouave Uniform, and will parade  
through the principal streets and thoroughfares.  
All the Great Artists from Niblo's Garden, New York,  
will appear in conjunction with  
**SLOAT'S NEW YORK CIRCUS,**  
including the wonderful equestrienne,  
**Mlle. Ella Zoyara,**  
pronounced by the profession, even her rivals, the  
most celebrated in Europe, to be the most accomplished,  
daring and fascinating rider that has ever appeared in  
the Arena. The performance of this distinguished lady  
have been witnessed, applauded and patronized by most  
of the PRINCES AND NOBILITY OF EUROPE. Her  
advent in America was hailed with enthusiasm, and in  
over 300 performances in the principal cities not one  
has passed without manifest expressions of approbation  
and delight.

resort was first opened on July 1, 1858, as a summer promenade by DeForrest & Teesdale, where musical concerts and other exhibitions were presented. Nixon proposed converting and enlarging it into a place of Elysian beauty similar to the Cremorne Gardens of London. He developed three new features on the property—a stretch of canvas under which

equestrian performances were given; a building devoted to the display of trees, flowers and shrubbery called Floral Hall; and a concert pagoda designated the Palace of Music; in all, an intermingling of natural beauty, ballet, opera, and circus. The American Cremorne Gardens opened its doors to the public on June 9 under the business management of Col. T. Allston Brown. With the recent ruckus over the concert saloon issue in the state legislature making it illegal for a place of entertainment to sell intoxicating beverages, the management clearly announced that "no vinous, malt or spirituous liquors will be furnished or tolerated."<sup>4</sup> The usual evening began at 7:30 with a one hour musical; that is, ballet, concert, or opera, with a change of program weekly. Patrons could stroll about the grounds while listening to such artists as Carlotta, Patti, Sig. Sbriglia, and Mme. Amelia Patti-Strakosch, or an orchestra led by Harvey Dodworth. After the music was terminated, equestrian exhibitions of another 1 1/2 hour duration were performed. Nixon's circus artists included the French equestrienne, Madame Louise Tourniaire; the Conrad Brothers, Charles and William, clowns and gymnasts; the clown Julian Kent; and Horace F. Nichols, the veteran rider, equestrian director, and ringmaster. The expected summer garden food fare was available—ices, creams, jellies, confectionery, cakes, fruits, etc. Commodore Foote and Colonel Small appeared in their elaborate chariot drawn by Lilliputian ponies to welcome the patrons. Some Iroquois Indians gave exhibitions of tribal dancing. Thomas Baker of Laura Keane's Theatre led the promenade orchestra. The pantomimes *Spirit of the Flood*, *The Golden Egg* and *The Wizard Skiff* were presented in turn. Firework displays were frequently given at the close of the evening. Admission for all was 25¢; reserved armchairs in the Palace of Music,



25¢ extra; orchestra armchairs, 25¢ extra.

One of the features of the summer, "the chief joy of the Cremorne," was the beautiful Spanish pantomimist and *danseuse*, Isabel Cubas. She was born in Valencia del Cid, Spain, in 1837 and came to America in 1861. In September of that year she appeared at New York's Winter Garden, where she attracted public notice as a fascinating and voluptuous dancer. She was under Nixon's management and had, it was said, been recently married to him; which was untrue, of course, since he was still married to his wife Caroline at this time. For Cubas' benefit on October 6, she performed in J. T. Haines' time-worn piece, *The French Spy*.

The garden was shut down at the approach of cold weather. It had been a noble effort by the tireless proprietor but the outcome was a weak imitation of the English original. The season at the Cremorne did not live up to the flourish of printers' ink advertising the opening. Nixon had assembled a company of artists from the world of music and dance, which were intermixed with the more commonly appealing artists of the arena, a little something for everyone. But the novelties were not of a high order and the artists already too familiar to the New York public. The admission price was reasonable, it is true; but the prices for refreshments were far too high for a broad portion of the promenaders. At the outset, bad weather kept people away; with better weather the business picked up somewhat but in the end the "great expectations" were not realized. The near 3,000 in attendance at the eventful opening tapered off dramatically after the first week. The effort failed to pay and was not repeated another year. The conclusion was that proprietor Nixon had spread himself thin with his various management projects: "Mr. Nixon has some clever ideas, but he lacks the stamina to carry them out in the same spirit in which they are conceived; he is not steady enough; he has too many irons in the fire at once, and frequently burns his fingers in the vain attempt to haul them out and work them up at one and the same time."<sup>5</sup>

Hardly before the gates closed on the gardens, Nixon took Carlotta Patti under his managerial wing.

The third of three singing Patti daughters, she had made her debut



Zoyara as he appeared with Nixon. Robert Kitchen collection.

only a year earlier. Although she exhibited a beautiful voice and exquisite style, she was confined by a physical lameness that limited her professional career. Nevertheless, Nixon leased the Academy of Music for the purpose of re-introducing her to opera-loving New Yorkers. At the same time, he took over the management of the Boston Theatre for the 1862-63 winter season, which opened in September with the Ravel Family. Then, on October 6, Carlotta Patti began an engagement there that consisted of five Italian operas.

Also at this time, Nixon sent a company to Washington under the management of T. Allston Brown with plans for opening on Thursday, October 16. A semi-permanent wooden and canvas building was erected at Pennsylvania Avenue and Seventh Street, said to be the same structure used at the Cremorne Gardens New York, "the interior being high and dry, the seats so arranged that all can get a good view of the arena." The advertisement revealed that some 500 arm chairs were taken from Cremorne Gardens for use in Washington; and that a circus marquee was attached at a cost of \$3,000, over which was a balcony for promenade concerts to be given every noon and evening. But a notice abruptly appeared in the papers, announcing a postponement of the opening until Saturday, October 18. Apparently the building had not been readied for occupancy in time: "On Saturday night the new and beautiful Exhibition Temple was formally opened to the public. The rush

of patrons was extensive, and, long before the time designed for the commencement of the entertainments, the auditorium was densely packed. Hundreds were compelled to undergo disappointment, the management refusing to sell more tickets than there was capacity for accommodating the purchasers."<sup>6</sup>

Nixon's advertisements were generous in their use of space and vociferous in descriptive phrasing. "Look out for the striped canopy!" "Behold the mammoth bill boards!" They identified the establishment as being "Nixon's Cremorne Garden Circus, From the Cremorne Gardens, the Palace of Music, and Equestrian School, New York, with a Full Equestrian Company and the Popular Spanish Ballet Troupe."

Nixon continued to intermix art and entertainment. The initial ads made a particular point in suggesting that the interior of the building was "entirely different from the objectionable tents under which the ordinary strolling showmen are forced to give their entertainments," a statement which might suggest the presence of a tented competitor within the locality. And there was.

The Gardner & Hemmings circus was already set up on the city market lot. In his reminiscences, Richard Hemmings recalled that he and his partners decided to take a show to Washington to get money ahead for the 1863 season. They had closed the summer tour, which was by no means a banner one for most shows, on September 8 at Hanover, Pennsylvania.

"We opened negotiations with a man by the name of Grover, who managed a theatre there," Hemmings remembered. "He came on to Philadelphia to talk over our proposition, and before he left we had arranged with him to bring on our show and work on percentage basis. We had great difficulty in moving our show there, either by rail or boat, as every conveyance was occupied in transporting the soldiers, ammunition and supplies; but at last we managed to get there, and opened under a 120-foot round top where the market is now located, and we did a big business."<sup>7</sup>

Presumably, both parties vied for the large number of daily visitors to the city, as well as the thousands of soldiers billeted in and around it. The Nixon camp was well fortified, featuring the exciting *danseuse*, Isabel Cubas, as well as Dr. James L.



Thayer and his comic mules, the Conrad Brothers, Barney Carroll and daughter, Charles Madigan, Charles Devere, William Naylor, Thomas Armstrong Sam Webb, Mlle. Augusta (her first appearance in America), and the little men Colonel Small and Commodore Foote. Also Harry Whitby, the successful horse-breaker, was there with his apprentices, Willie, Johnny, and Elvira (the latter, ironically, shortly to become Mrs. Richard Hemmings).

In order to adequately compete with the Nixon troupe, Hemmings asserted, an arrangement was made with P. T. Barnum for the services of the Albino Family, General Tom Thumb and Commodore Nutt. Hemmings also claimed that in retaliation Nixon debased Barnum in his newspaper advertisements; and, hearing of this "slander," Barnum went to Washington "with fire in his eye," got hold of the best newspaper man in town, and sent him forth to do, what the *Clipper* later labeled, "the battle of the dwarfs." With the master of publicity as a foe, Hemmings suggested, Nixon's camp soon retreated to Baltimore.<sup>8</sup>

Further investigation tends to challenge the accuracy of such recollections. In examining the Washington, D.C., *Daily National Intelligencer* and the *Daily Morning Chronicle* from September 20 through December 31, 1862, we find no reference to a Gardner & Hemmings circus. Perhaps they were too impoverished as a relatively new organization to utilize newspaper advertising. But after Nixon's initial announcement on October 15, an opposition ad appeared the following day. It was for Barnum's Museum, Circus and Mammoth Amphitheatre at Louisiana Avenue and Tenth Street, which was exhibiting the Albino Family, Commodore Nutt, General Tom Thumb, Old Adams' California Bears, the famous grizzly Samson, and all the members of the Great American Circus, which included Richard Hemmings and Dan Gardner in the list of performers. The same day an item appeared on page one: "Barnum, of world-wide reputation, is now daily and nightly affording our citizens witnessing his famous museum and circus. Thousands are rushing to see the wonderful sights which he unfolds for the amusement of young and old."<sup>9</sup>



P. T. Barnum and General Tom Thumb. Pfening Archives.

Directly, in an advertisement of October 20, Nixon, with unabashed bravado, blatantly dropped the glove for a "battle of the dwarfs."<sup>10</sup>

"A WAY TO TEST RELATIVE MERITS, and add to the fund of the Soldiers' Aid Association, the undersigned seeing a card signed P. T. Barnum, manager of Barnum's Bear Show, &c., in which he states that he has THE SMALLEST DWARF IN THE WORLD, begs leave to issue the following conditions of a challenge, to wit:

"1. To place Commodore NUTT and Commodore FOOT together on a platform in some respectable building in this city, and let the public determine which is the *smaller* of the two.

"2. To allow a committee chosen by Mr. Barnum and myself, and an umpire appointed by the committee, to enter into conversations with the Dwarfs on ordinary subjects--politics, geography, military matters, works of art, foreign languages, & c., and then determine the comparative mental powers of each.

"3. To allow both Dwarfs to give specimens of their performances, to show the extent of their artistic acquisitions.

"4. To allow the proceeds of the ex-

hibition to go to the fund of the Soldiers' Aid Association.

"5. To show the authenticated family records of both, so that their ages can be unmistakably determined.

"The above stipulation I have drawn from a letter previously sent by me to Mr. Barnum, but which he has not answered. Perhaps it did not reach him; so I offer the above in order that he and the public shall see them, and in the hopes that he will accept my proposition. JAMES M. NIXON Proprietor of Cremorne Garden Circus."

It is not surprising that Barnum, in his own defense, responded with a card in the newspaper of the following day:<sup>11</sup> "The only reply Mr. Barnum thinks necessary to make to the challenge contained in this morning's paper is that he will not aid in a newspaper warfare for the purpose of giving notoriety to an itinerant adventurer, whose only features are the 'armed chairs' and a party of bogus *figurantes*, palmed upon the public as 'Spanish,' but whose faces have never been outside of the United States, not withstanding their pompous foreign announcement.

"With regard to the proposed donation to the Soldiers' Aid Association, Mr. Barnum has already paid thousands of dollars to aid the war for the Union; and he agrees that the services of Commodore Nutt, General Tom Thumb, or any other attraction which he has control of, are at the FREE disposal of the Soldiers' Aid Association whenever they hold a fair or exhibition where they may be of use to them. And Mr. B. will also present one thousand dollars to this Association whenever the showman alluded to will give five hundred dollars, after having paid up his unfortunate employes.

"The ladies and gentlemen who daily and nightly throng Mr. Barnum's establishment declare that never within their memory has been seen any "man in miniature" worthy of being named or thought of, or who will in the slightest degree compare with these symmetrical, intelligent, and talented little gentlemen--Commodore Nutt and General Tom Thumb; and, furthermore, that they never before witnessed in any one establishment such a vast and amusing concentration of talent and novelty as are to be seen at Barnum's Museum, Circus and Menagerie.



"With this reply to the notoriety seeking sojourner, it is respectfully recommended that the gentleman move along to some locality where his genius will be better appreciated."

Alongside the Barnum oddities, the circus company was made up of notable artists. In addition to Hemmings and the Gardners, advertisements included the noted equestrienne, Madame Louise Tourniaire, Edwin Derious, Reynolds, Kincade, Hill, Whittaker, and a group designated the Ravel family. The Ravel family? Well, maybe. Or is this another Barnum humbug?

It is unclear just who the Ravels were, for on October 25 a suggestive item appeared in the *Intelligencer*: "The wonderful Gabriel Ravel Troupe, admitted by all to be the only original Ravel organization in America, close their brilliant engagement tonight in Baltimore, and open at Ford's Theatre (Tenth Street) in this city, on Monday evening next." On the same day a card appeared as well: "MR. EDITOR: The authorized assumption of the Ravel Family title for the purpose of dignifying in the popular esteem entertainments intrinsically mean and worthless is, unfortunately, of too frequent occurrence to challenge, ordinarily, [by] a protest from myself or any other member of the Ravel family; the more especially as that we felt certain the popular intelligence would readily penetrate the character of the fraud and appreciate its object. Heretofore these unworthy attempts to usurp the artistic reputation it is the good fortune of my brothers and myself to have acquired at the hands of the American people have been confined to vulgar and obscure bands of itinerant performers; but it is with some surprise and no inconsiderable indignation I have noted the unwarrantable deception attempted to be practiced upon the citizens of Washington by attaching the title of the Ravel family to certain performances now being given in that city under the direction of Mr. P. T. Barnum. I am unwilling to believe that a gentleman so familiar as Mr. Barnum undoubtedly is with the proprieties of the artistic world, and with the principles of fair dealing, could countenance so gross a fraud; and [I] should confidently claim from him, personally, the correction of

this imposture, if but that justice both to the community and to the management of Ford's Theatre, Washington, with whom I am about to commence a brief engagement, demand. I should thus publicly declare that the adoption of the title, or of any professional distinction of the Ravel family, is a usurpation, wholly without color or warrant. I am myself, it seems scarcely necessary for me to add, the only member of the original Ravel family now in America, my brothers Antoine, Francois, and Jerome being at present in France, and the legitimate representative, therefore, in this country of their professional reputation and artistic dignity. GABRIEL RAVEL Baltimore, Oct. 24, 1862."

A reply from Barnum was quite unnecessary, for on the same page a display ad announced the last two days of the so-called Barnum's Museum, Circus and Menagerie. Following the performance on October 28, the Nixon adversaries, Thumb, Nutt & Co., would leave the field, and Gardner & Hemmings remove to Philadelphia, where on November 24 they would open in a building on the south side of Market Street above Twelfth, formerly known as National Hall. And Nixon would have Washington to himself.

What was the upshot of this exchange of epithets between two respected impresarios? The *Clipper* suggested that the incident was an

Mme. Louise Tourniaire performed for Nixon at Cremorne Gardens. Ringling Museum of the Circus.



old farce, *The Pot Calling the Kettle Naughty Names*, and the cards published in the Washington papers the work of "blockheads." Yet there was suspicion that the whole thing may have been merely a publicity device making use of "the battle of the dwarfs" for, as the *Clipper* man put it, "the sake of postage stamps that look so nice and fresh in Washington." He went on to suggest that "if it is all acting, both heroes must travel with awfully muddy wheels to their war chariots."<sup>12</sup> But one thing is certain; Nixon was not run out of town.

Despite the disparity in admission prices between the two circuses--the Cremorne Garden Circus scaled the amphitheatre at 75¢, 50¢, and 25¢; at Barnum's Museum, Circus and Menagerie it was 25¢ to all--Nixon's advertising out-lavished and his circus out-stayed the Barnum party by well over a month. From all appearances, Nixon was the victor.

Unrivaled, the Nixon Cremorne Garden Circus seemingly prospered. Eaton Stone, the celebrated equestrian, styled the "Wizard Horseman," began an engagement on October 27, in which he impersonated a "Comanche on the War Path." Dr. James L. Thayer was still on hand with his black and white mules, as were the original company of circus performers and, for a short time longer, the enchanting Isabel Cubas.

On the 31st of October came the announcement that the Washington Theatre, corner of Eleventh and O Streets, would re-open under the auspices of James M. Nixon. With Barnum and his associates gone, things must have been getting dull for the proprietor of perpetual motion. In announcing the theatre operation, he promised the citizens of Washington the "choicest dramatic works," "artists of the highest celebrity," and an unequalled combination company. The season was to be inaugurated with three great stars, the "first and foremost" being La Senorita Isabel Cubas. And indeed Nixon's Washington Theatre opened on Wednesday, November 5, with a strong dramatic company featuring F. S. Chanfrau. On the 10th Cubas reappeared in the grand military drama, *The French Spy*, Miss Fannie Brown was introduced in *Pocahontas*; or, *Ye Gentle Savage*, with A. H. Davenport as Capt. John Smith. Then, some three weeks later, on November 27, Cubas took her farewell benefit, which



included a repeat representation of *The French Spy*, in which she enacted three principal characters, with a Greek dance and a broad sword combat thrown in. With the departure of Cubas, Nixon's interest in the Washington Theatre seems to have departed as well, for on December 10 the newspapers announced a grand reopening of the place under the management of G. and F. Maeder. So ended another Nixon enterprise.

Back at the circus, things went on uninterrupted. William Conrad, the Teutonic clown, took a benefit on November 8. On the 11th, *The Field of the Cloth of Gold* was unveiled, a piece that Nixon had previously staged at Franconi's Hippodrometo great success. The following night Prof. Haller, "adept in the mysterious arts of chemistry and rapid manipulations" appeared. The clown Jimmy Reynolds and equestrienne Marie Carroll were added to the program. Pony races were advertised for the 22nd, along with the Sherwood family, and with them, of course, the original "Pete Jenkins." More new faces were gradually added, among which were Luke and Charles Rivers, the clown Frank Phelps, and a cornet band. By December 1, the ads were heralding a big double company. Then, only two days later, it was revealed that Nixon planned to establish a theatre in Alexandria where spectacles would be produced, replete with scenery, machinery, horsemanship and dramatic effects. It was noted that he was at present in the city and would personally superintend the direction of his affairs. The double company was divided and a portion moved over to Alexandria for opening on Monday, December 8.

With Nixon's departure to Alexandria, the building was turned over to Tom King, the champion leaper. Still operating under the banner of Nixon's Cremorne Garden Circus and with all the appearance of Nixon's divided company, King opened on the 8th with Barney Carroll and daughter, the Conrad Brothers, William F. Smith, Mons. Rochelle and others for a week's engagement. The lateness of the season seemed to present no problem. The weather remained pleasant and, we were informed, the amphitheatre was now being heated by patent furnaces, making it the most comfortable arena ever erected in the city. The Washington public exhibited sufficient interest to allow the engage-

ment to be extended through Saturday, December 20.

Then, on the following Monday, the troupe returned from Alexandria where, the advertisements boasted in typical Nixon style, "for a period of two weeks they appeared before 21,000 people." The double company apparently remained until Friday, the 26th, when Dr. Richard P. Jones, the affable circus writer, took a benefit. With that, the Nixon Washington adventure ended for the year.

In the spring of 1863, Nixon and Thaddeus Barton, leased the circus lot in Baltimore on Calvert Street, known as the "city spring lot," for the purpose of erecting a summer garden similar to what Nixon had done at Palace Gardens the previous year. But within short order the Baltimore city council rejected the plan, inasmuch as the lot was to be fixed up



Sam Lathrop, the well known clown, appeared for Nixon in 1863. Pfening Archives.

for what it was intended, a city spring.

Undaunted by this defeat, Nixon's organization returned to Washington again and opened under canvas May 26 on the lot at the corner of New York Avenue and 14th Street near Willard's Hotel. The company was billed in the local newspapers as Madame Macarte's Grand European Circus Combined with Nixon's Great Cremorne Troupe from New York, with twenty-five star performers.

The roster included the Syro-Arabie Troupe of male and female gymnasts; the clowning of James Cooke, Sam Lathrop and Jimmy Reynolds; Barney Carroll and his adopted daughter in a double riding act; Eaton Stone in his Indian personation on his "wild prairie steed" and the incomparable Herr Cline on the tight-rope.

It was with this company that James Cooke, clown and all-around performer, made his American debut. The Dublin born Cooke, whose real name was Patrick Hoey, began as an actor in Mrs. Ellen Burke's traveling theatre, exhibiting chiefly at fairs. After learning acrobatics and feats of contortion on his own, he entered into circus performing. Subsequently, he turned to clowning, taking the great English jester, William F. Walllett, as his model, and for some time performed at Astley's Amphitheatre.

He had left Liverpool April 20 on the ship *Anglo-Saxon* bound for Quebec, but en route his ship was wrecked. Through good fortune he escaped "together with six shillings, a broken-bladed penknife, and a canary bird in a cage," which he had rescued from the sinking ship. After struggling to New York and presenting himself to Nixon on arrival, he was engaged and made his trans-Atlantic debut in the tented pavilion at the Washington opening.<sup>13</sup>

Still, it was Mme. Marie Macarte, with her beautiful stud of trained horses and Shetland ponies, who was the center piece of the circus program. Her personation act of the "Venetian Carnival" was featured at the beginning of the run. Then, on June 1, the equestrian spectacle of *Dick Turpin, the Bold Highwayman* was introduced, including "Turpin's Ride to York" and "The Death of Black Bess," with Macarte enacting the role of Dick Turpin. On June 6, the closing day, she took her benefit at the afternoon and evening performances. At this time, an additional novelty was announced for the afternoon free attraction—Mlle. Josephine Devinier was to make an ascent on a tight-rope, "walking across New York Avenue and completely over the Pavilion tent."<sup>14</sup>

The show moved next to Alexandria where they won the gratitude of Union soldiers tediously waiting to protect Washington.<sup>15</sup> Politicians, lobbyists, and state officials were a part of the patronage despite the surrounding strife. The town was under martial law and, as enemy raids were a constant threat,



no lights were allowed after a certain hour and the circus was required to close at 9:30. The stand lasted until early June when a falling off of business forced its closing.

After Alexandria, the company took to the road, opening at Annapolis, Maryland, June 15. The show returned to Baltimore on 22nd for a three day stand, followed by single days in Wilmington, Delaware, and Havre de Grace, Maryland, before jumping to Philadelphia at Broad and Locust Streets for the Fourth of July week. This was followed by a series of stands throughout Pennsylvania and New Jersey.<sup>16</sup> A week in Harrisburg proved particularly profitable, since the show arrived just as the contingent of soldiers stationed there received their pay. By this time Thaddeus Barton was business manager. At Allentown, July 23, the clown, Jimmy Reynolds, was married to Franke Christie, a member of the company. Along the way, ropewalker Josephine Webb was badly injured. She, quite likely, was the Josephine Devinier previously advertised on the bills. Finally, by mid-September, Madame Marie Marcate was posting an "at liberty" notice in the *Clipper*.

Nixon's next project was to erect an arena in New York City at Fourteenth Street and Irving Place, opposite the Academy of Music, which was opened on August 31, 1863, as the Alhambra, a name justified by its pseudo-Moorish design. The place consisted of a new 85 by 90 foot round top of canvas enclosed with the old sidewall that had been used for the traveling circus. The gas-lit arena contained a ring of standard size, 42 feet in diameter, with wooden curbing two feet high and two feet in width. The interior was divided into two parts--the pit and dress circle. Admission to the former was 25¢ and to the latter, called reserved seats, 50¢. The regular seating consisted of hard planks, similar to what was used by all traveling companies (although some circuses used a carpet covering on them). The boards, no wider than eight inches, were placed on uprights, simply laid on, being neither nailed nor tied. There was space between the ring curbing and the bleachers where camp stools were added when the regular seating was filled.<sup>17</sup>

We are again indebted to a *Clipper* correspondent for a description of the opening night program. The en-

tree consisted of three ladies and nine gentlemen--Louisa Wells, Jennie Sylvester (Mrs. William Aymar), Mrs. Barney Carroll, Horace Nichols, Barney Carroll, Jimmy Reynolds, Eaton Stone, and William Odell. This was followed by a double globe act by two unnamed performers. Barney Carroll then did a two-horse act, during which he carried William Odell about the ring.

James Cooke, dressed in the cap and bells style of the old court fools, played to this act and made his debut to a New York audience. "At times a person is disposed to like him for his wit, but then again he says something very stale and flat, and at once removes the favorable impression already made. He has fallen into the same error that Dan Rice has, that the audience are only present to hear him talk, and he keeps his tongue going incessantly. . . . His jokes are all old, worn out, and stale ones that have been peddled around the country for twenty years by every jester."<sup>18</sup>

Nixon newspaper ad used in 1863. Pfening Archives.

James Nicolo and his boy were introduced next in air and ground exercises, with the youngster receiving generous applause. Nicolo had come to America from England, bringing three boys--Thomas, George, and John Ridgeway--in 1853 and appeared with them at Franconi's Hippodrome in acts of posturing and acrobatics. After several seasons, the troupe returned home, where the boys became prominent as the Ridgeway Brothers. This year Nicolo was back with another boy, Bobby Nicolo, known as "The Flying Boy" (later combining with William Rodney and Thomas Tolliday as the Tallen Brothers).

Charles Parker was next on the program with a contortion and chair trick act, which was accused of being dragged out to too great a length. The veteran, Eaton Stone, succeeded

NIXON'S  
**Cremorne Circus!**  
EXTRA ADVERTISEMENT.



FIRST APPEARANCE IN AMERICA OF THE WORLD'S WONDERS,  
**The Renowned SYRO-ARABIC TROUPE of Male and Female Jugglers, Acrobats, Contortionists, &c.**  
NOTICE.—ZAHNA and ZULFIKA, the beautiful and renowned female members of this UNRIVALLED ACROBATIC TROUPE, are the FIRST FEMALE GYMNASTS THAT HAVE EVER APPEARED IN AMERICA.

WILL EXHIBIT AT CAMDEN ON:  
MONDAY AFTERNOON & EVENING,  
JULY 13, 1863.

with a graceful turn of bareback riding. Then came the gymnast who was considered the wonder of the 19th century, Mons. Verrecke, a man who had astonished Europe with his feats upon the trapeze. At this time, he performed on a single trapeze suspended by a rope from the center pole. "After being up there about ten minutes, and executing feats such as every gymnast in this country, who makes any pretension to trapeze performances, could perform, he pulls a snare drum up to him, which he straps over his shoulders, and then while sitting on the trapeze bar plays on the drum for several minutes. He then places the back of his head, or what is called the nape of the neck, on the bar and in that position strikes three taps on the drum, and--his 'wonderful, exciting, and daring' performance is at an end."<sup>19</sup>

In all fairness to the newly arrived Parisian, performing under the canvas roof of the Alhambra did not allow his regular gymnastic gear to be properly installed. As a consequence, his first appearance was a failure. Not wanting to continue under such circumstances, Verrecke cut off his engagement after only a few performances and, in a short time, was placed under contract by manager James Lingard for the New Bowery Theatre, where three weeks later, on September 21, he proved all he was represented to be. "He is, in his peculiar exercise, unapproachable. He attempts feats from which the most daring, skillful, and carefully trained athletes have shrunk, feats which the public would consider simply impossible did they not behold them."<sup>20</sup>

After a week at the New Bowery, Mons. Verrecke signed a one-year contract with manager Lea of Baltimore at a very liberal salary, making a first appearance for him at the



Front Street Theatre on October 19.

Following Verrecke on the Alhambra program were two unnamed importations from Europe who performed the Brothers Act, consisting of ground gymnastics, an exhibition which our reporter found very ordinary. He was enlivened, however, with the principal riding of Marie Carroll. "Her graceful bearing and pleasing presence cannot fail in adding greatly to the attraction of this establishment." The eleven Bedouin Arabs, who replaced her in the ring, executed a four-high posturing act and a series of somersaults that did not impress the *Clipper* representative, who exposed his disdain by labeling them "Hash Eaters who have just got their fill, and are laying down for a quiet snooze." The show closed with the performance of a trick pony, the property of a Mr. Metcalf of the Bull's Head Hotel.<sup>21</sup>

On September 21, young Nicolo made an impressive appearance in the Zampillaerostation act, astonishing even the hardened press. "He is quite a youth, but in this act excels every artist that has ever yet attempted it in this country. He is without doubt the most regularly and beautifully formed as well as fully developed young gymnast we ever saw stripped. He performs his act with the greatest precision and coolness, and, in this act, takes the rank of first and foremost. In fact, he is about the only real artist Nixon offers to his patrons."<sup>22</sup> Throughout the stand at the Alhambra, Nixon continued to augment his regular equestrian company with visiting stars. Still, the editor of the *Clipper* found little reason for rejoicing. Indeed, he labeled the performances inferior, particularly exemplified by a young lady, Sophie Sagrino, billed as the most "daring and fearless rider in the world." She made a debut that was anything but memorable on September 14 and elicited a disdainful observation from the *Clipper*, "It seemed just as difficult for her to keep her balance on the pad of a horse as it is for a good rider to fall off."

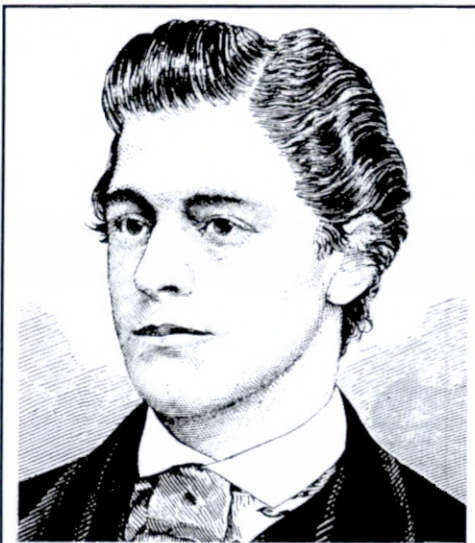
November and cold weather arrived, hand in hand. In the face of this, the flimsiness of the Alhambra structure made it necessary to close up on the 2nd. In assessing this latest project, the *Clipper* man pointed out what appears to be a recurring weakness in the Nixon management style, "He opens with a great flourish of trumpets, engages a good company, promises much (performs very little

of it, however), and in a week or so discharges all his best people and fills their places with inferior artists."<sup>23</sup>

The November dampness turned to ice for Nixon when his wife, Caroline, began suit for divorce, charging him with improper conduct in connection with an unnamed Cuban *danseuse*. The initial hearing took place November 24 before a referee appointed by the Superior Court of New York. Nixon was now faced with both an unsympathetic press and an estranged and unforgiving wife.

The next major Nixon endeavor was the opening of another place of entertainment on February 8, 1864. This permanent structure of corrugated iron was erected on the site of the Alhambra, modeled after the *Champs Élysées* in Paris. It was heated with steam and carefully designed to house winter entertainments. Described as "the new and superb equestrian temple," the place was designated the Hippotheatron. Lawrence V. Volk was the architect and W. G. Lord the contractor. The main part of the building was 110' in diameter and supported a dome rising to the height of 75', topped with a cupola. The auditory was divided into orchestra, dress circle, and pit. Orchestra seats were "armed sofas," the admission for which was 75¢; behind this was a dress circle capable of seating some 500 people, and the pit accommodating another 600. The entirety was surrounded by a hallway or promenade where standing room could be arranged. When the

Robert Stickney appeared in Nixon's 1864 Christmas circus. Pfening Archives.



occasion merited it, some 2,000 spectators could be sorted and packed into place. The ring was said to be the largest ever used for indoor performances in this country, measuring 43' 6", one and a half foot larger than Astley's of London. An interesting feature was the use of two ring entrances stationed opposite each other, which allowed utility and flexibility for *battoute* leaping and the staging of spectacles.

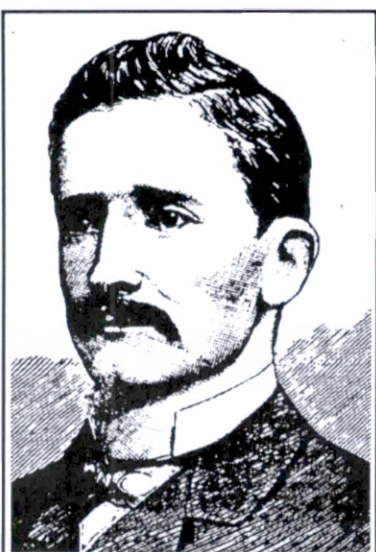
Nixon, at 44, was now at the top of his game. Odell described him as "a power and wielder of big interests." In February appreciative fellow showmen tendered him a benefit at the Bowery. But come the end of spring, Nixon suffered the loss of both Isabel Cubas and Caroline Nixon. The exciting *danseuse* and Nixon companion since her professional residence in this country passed away on Monday, June 20. While filling an engagement at the Walnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia, she was taken ill and entered into a period of suffering from the ailment until her death. Caroline, who had been afflicted with paralysis of the side for a long time, died in obscurity a short month later, on July 20, in Bangor, Maine.

The seats were dusted off again and the Hippotheatron re-opened for the 1864-65 winter season on October 3 under the Nixon's proprietorship, supported by the financial backing of Richard Platt. The skilled company was comprised of Francois Siegrist and Marietta Zanfretta, the Sherwoods (Charles, Virginia, Ida, and Charles, Jr.), Young Nicolo, Mlle. Angélique Miss DeVere, Miss Soyer, monkey-man Mons. William Olma (William Smith), Talleen Brothers, William Odell, Herr Mollique, and James V. Cameron (equestrian director, ringmaster and forty-horse driver). The clowns were Nat Austin and James Cooke. At this time the English clown, Edwin Croueste, first appeared, having been brought to the United States by S. B. Howes. On October 10 the great rider Eaton Stone appeared with Mons. Baptiste, the monkey-man, in *L'Homme du Bois*. James Melville and family (Samuel, Francis and George) came on October 24. New faces for the month of November included the performing dogs and monkeys of Henry Cooke, young Bob Stickney and his father, S. P. The great veteran equestrienne, Louise Tourniaire, was on the bill in December along with the gymnast Verrecke. A Christmas



pantomime, *Harlequin Bluebeard*, was produced with a cast that included M. Carron as Harlequin, Marietta Zanfretta as Columbine, Master Robert Stickney as the Sprite, François Siegrist as Pantaloon, and Nat Austin as clown. The piece was replaced in February with another pantomime, *Harlequin Mother Goose*, which ran to the end of March, when the Conrad Brothers were added to the bill. The successor to the latter pantomime was *The Fairy Prince O'Dono-hue*, which ran until it was replaced on May 15 by *The Elixir of Life, or, the Birth of Harlequin*.

In the spring of 1865, Nixon erected a temporary building in Washington, D.C., near Sixth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, to house arenic entertainments. The structure consisted of wooden sides and a canvas top, with a large wooden dressing area, a spacious arched entrance with a ticket office on each side, and a stage that could be inserted at short notice. The management included Nixon, William Nichols, and Richard Platt. Charley Sherwood's "Pete Jenkins" and the educated horse, General Scott, were feature attractions when the place opened on May 29. The equestrian department was made up of the Sherwoods, William Nichols, Delevanti Brothers, Messrs. Rivers, Henderson, Campbell, Conklin, and Smith. However, the entertainment was not strictly equestrian, since much of the program included oleo acts enhanced by a *corps de ballet*. The Ellinger & Foote Moral Exhibition--whatever that entailed--was engaged to perform in conjunction to the regular company; but the troupe remained only one week, closing on June 10. Competition appeared in the form of Stone, Rosston & Co.'s Circus on June 8-10 at a lot on the corner of Sixth and York Avenue. After the middle of the month, business tapered off; so, closing in Washington, Nixon added John Foster, George Batcheller, and Frank Carpenter and the circus moved as far as south as Raleigh, Goldsboro, and New Bern, North Carolina, the gen-



eral area where Nixon had taken his railroad circus in 1860. At the latter place, coin was plentiful in the ticket wagon, the town being filled with soldiers. The show returned north at the end of July and hovered around New York City.

Leaper George M. Batcheller joined Nixon in the spring of 1865. Pfening Archives

In the autumn, a tour was organized for visiting the principal towns of Texas by rail. The company left New York the 19th of October on the *Catherine Whiting* headed for Galveston; but after leaving port the ocean became so rough that the ship had to lay overnight at Sandy Hook. On the 23rd a heavy gale set in and the following day one of the ring horses went overboard. By nightfall all of the horses had been washed into the sea (including the performing horse, Gen. Scott, all belonging to William W. Nichols. All ring stock was fortuitously insured. At one point, William E. Burke, the famous clown, was swept overboard only to be rescued by the *USS South Carolina*. Then, at the height of the storm, the ship's engine gave out, exposing the boat and passengers to the mercy of the tempest for a period of 32 hours. On October 28 the steamer went ashore five miles south of Carysfort Reef, Florida. Finally, the brig stopped at Key West for repairs, but for whatever reason may have been towed to New Orleans.<sup>24</sup> The circus, too badly bruised to continue to Texas, was sold or leased to Thayer & Noyes, who combined the shows into two units, incorporating the best elements of Nixon's shipwrecked troupe. One unit, under the management of Thayer, chartered the steamboat *Ida May* and left for Shreveport on December 17 and thence to the principal towns up the Mississippi and Red Rivers. Bad fortune struck when the boat sank near the mouth of the Loggy Bayou; but somehow the circus property was recovered and returned safely to New Orleans.<sup>25</sup> It might be noted in passing that among the group was Charles Devere, who throughout his career received the reputation as a "Jonah," one who brought bad luck

with him to the companies he joined.

#### NOTES

1. *Billboard*, October 27, 1934, p. 40.
2. *New York Clipper*, September 14, 1861, p. 174.
3. M. B. Leavitt, *Fifty Years in Theatrical Management*, p. 64.
4. Odell, *History of the New York Stage*, Vol. VII, p. 443.
5. City Summary, dated August 25, *New York Clipper*, August 30, 1862, 158.
6. Washington, D.C., *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 20, 1862, p. 1.
7. Al Fostell, "Richard Hemmings, the Oldest Living Showman," *New York Clipper*, December 25, 1915, p. 45.
8. *New York Clipper*, December 25, 1915. Barnum had been represented in Washington in late February, 1862, by his "Cabinet of Living Curiosity" which were exhibited at Franklin Hall for a few days. The What Is It? and the Albino Family were featured.
9. Washington, D.C., *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 16, 1862, p. 1.
10. *Ibid.*, October 20, 1862, p. 3.
11. *Ibid.*, October 21, 1862, p. 3.
12. *New York Clipper*, November 8, 1862, p. 239.
13. Tom Cringle, *A Brief Memoir of Mr. James Cooke, Royal Jester and Circus Clown*, p. 15.
14. Washington's *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 1, 6, 1863; *Daily Morning Chronicle*, May 25, June 4, 6, 1863.
15. Here the *Clipper* included the names of Fanny Forrest and Ada Ogden to the roster.
16. Germantown, Pennsylvania, July 8; Frankford, 9; Haddonfield, New Jersey, 10; Atlantic City, 11; Camden, 13; Burlington, 14; Mt. Holly, 15; Bordentown, 16; Trenton, 17; Freehold, 18; Long Branch, 20; Allentown, Pennsylvania, 23; Easton, 24; Princeton, New Jersey, 25; Elizabeth, 26; Newark, 27; Jersey City, 28.
17. *New York Clipper*, September 19, 1863, 171.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, November 7, 1863, p. 233.
21. *Ibid.*, September 19, 1863, 171.
22. City Summary, Monday, September 29; *New York Clipper*, October 3, 1863, p. 195.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, November 18, 1865, p. 255. The roster included Mme. Macarte, Sid Webb and wife, W. W. Nichols, Miaco Brothers, Henry Bernard, Frank Carpenter, Frank Donaldson and son, Melville, Burt Lyman, Devere, William Kennedy, G. Jones, Howard Duryea, agent. J. Farrell and six members were the band.
25. *Ibid.*, January 6, 1866, p. 311. Thayer's roster included the Stickney family, Tom King and wife, Burrows, Kelly, Campbell Saunders, John Robinson, etc. Noyes' company consisted of Carlotta DeBerg, James Cooke, Miaco Brothers, Jimmy Reynolds, Prof. DeLouis, etc.



## Jules Jacot

Without question Clyde Beatty was the greatest and best known big cage trainer in the history of the American circus. His showmanship and handling skill surpassed all others. However, many competent trainers influenced his career. Two who contributed to his early training were Jules Jacot and Allen King.

Jules Jacot was born Gerald Irwin in New York City in 1890. However, he was raised in Germany near the famed Leipzig Zoo. Here he spent many youthful hours watching the zoo lion trainer. The desire to train wild animals was born in him then.

His circus career began in the United States with the Sparks Circus as a baggage team driver in 1908. By 1912 he was involved in the training of wild animals. His first act was a group of five leopards on Gollmar Bros. Circus in 1913 and 1914. In 1915 Jacot worked a lion act on the Yankee Robinson Circus using the name Vincent DeGuerra. At that time it was common to change a trainer's name from season to season. At times he was billed as Jerry Jacobs.

By 1919 Jacot had found employment as an animal man at a studio in Hollywood, California. He went to Germany in 1921 and arranged for the shipment of three elephants, four leopards, two Polar bears, monkeys and a large python to a movie studio.

In 1922 Mike Golden, owner of the Howe's Great London and Van Amburg's Trained Wild Animal Shows, hired Jacot as trainer. He worked

Jules Jacot, well known circus and zoo wild animal trainer. Pfening Archives.



## CIRCUS WILD ANIMAL TRAINERS

# JULES JACOT ALLEN KING BERT NELSON

By Bill Johnston

ten lions in a fighting display. His wife Ruth presented a group of female lions. In 1923 the show's title was changed to Golden Bros. where Jacot handled a fighting lion act.

Jacot went to work for the American Circus Corporation's Sells-Floto Circus in 1924. There he worked a tiger riding an elephant and a female lion group. His wife worked a leopard and puma act. The 1927 season found Jacot with the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus where he worked a small lion group as a pre-feature for the young Clyde Beatty, who was becoming well known.

In 1929 Jacot returned to Sells-Floto for the last year cage acts were used by that circus. Jacot worked lions; Mabel Stark, the tigers; and Allen King, a large group of twenty lions and tigers.

Jacot moved to the Al G. Barnes Circus in 1930, handling lions. He later handled Ziggy the elephant with the Singer Midget troupe. Jacot was then with a large carnival in Mexico. The depression saw the number of circuses on tour take a nose dive. There were few job opportunities for wild animal trainers in the 1930s.

In the fall of 1942 Jacot went to work for the St. Louis Zoo. Mike Kostial Sr., father of Mike Jr., the famed chimpanzee trainer at the zoo, had

introduced a lion show there in 1933. Mike Sr. died in 1941. It was then that Jacot began a long, successful run at the zoo.

During his years there he developed an amazing array of trained wild animal displays. His big act featured ten male and ten female lions, three tigers and two brown bears. The zoo director felt the bears were too dangerous for Jacot to handle. One day when Jacot was off, he had them destroyed.

At the end of the 1954 season Jacot and the zoo director had a disagreement about salary. About that time Paul Kelly bought the zoo's old elephant act. A deal was worked out for Jacot to buy the cats and go to work for Kelly. Kelly decided to split the act, sending Jacot on the road with the females and Lou Regan with the males.

The first date for Jacot was the Cincinnati Shrine Circus. The opening night was a disaster. The act took forty-five minutes. The next performance Regan took over and the act moved better. That was the end of his employment with Paul Kelly.

Jacot drifted to California and went to work at Jungleland in Thousand Oaks. In 1956 he made an eight week tour of Canada with the Clyde Bros. Circus. He later broke some new lions for Clyde Beatty.

Replacement trainers at the St. Louis Zoo had not been satisfactory. The last trainer was terminated in July of 1959. Director George Vielheller sent Mike Kostial Jr. to California to lure Jacot back. By then he was seventy years old.

Jacot working a mixed act at the St. Louis Zoo in the 1950s. Pfening Archives.





Jacot returned to the zoo and took over the lion and tiger group and put together his own five male lion act. In 1967 he trained a mixed group of four leopards, three pumas and a young lion. By then the zoo became concerned about Jacot's age. It was decided not to renew his contract in 1970.

He was replaced by Jim Alexander, a young, enterprising trainer. Alexander developed a new sea lion show for the zoo. Robert Baudy of Center Hill, Florida bought the lion-tiger group and three lions owned by Jacot. He later sold them to the Carson and Barnes Circus.

Jacot's final work was at the Glen Oak Zoo in Peoria, Illinois. He worked an old male lion and an act with four leopards and a young lion during the summer of 1970. The old male lion died and the young lion became too much for him to handle. Jacot had reached the end of his action-filled career. He gave his other animals away. He developed cancer and died on January 25, 1971.

### Allen King

Allen Edmond King was born in Cedartown, Georgia on November 20, 1898. His early years were spent in Chattanooga, Tennessee. At thirteen he left home for Texas to join the Swain Dramatic Company, working back stage. Later he was on the Wortham Carnival where he cleaned the wild animal cages. It was on that carnival that he became fascinated with the big cats.

In 1915 he joined the Sells-Floto Circus, working for Cap Dutch Ricardo, the head trainer. King pestered Ricardo to teach him to work the big cats. This was his introduction to the big cage.

World War I intervened and King joined the Army. Following his discharge he returned to Chattanooga where he worked as a taxi driver.

In 1922 King joined the Al G. Barnes Circus in Dallas, working for Louis Roth, head trainer for the circus, who took him under his wing. King's training skills developed fast.

In 1923 he was given a twelve female lion act. While Roth was showing King the routine and points of



King featured in the Live Power Show at the Century of Progress in Chicago. Circus World Museum collection.

handling the group, a fight broke out between the female lions. King entered the cage and rushed to help Roth fight off the jungle beasts. King's quick thinking in a dangerous situation made a big impression on Roth. He continued working with King until he was an accomplished trainer.

King was ready for the big time. In 1924 he was hired by the Sells-Floto Circus and worked a Polarbear and a six male lion act. Other trainers presenting the big cat acts on the Floto show that season were Jules Jacot

King and his lion Jimmy on Cole Bros. in 1935. Circus World Museum collection.



and Aga Christensen. That year he met Mickey Coe, a pretty young aerialist. They were married in Patterson, New Jersey in a civil ceremony. The marriage did not last long. Mickey later said, "Allen had a compulsion, an addiction, for games with dice and cards. He was chronically unlucky, so altogether unlucky that by a season's end we

had no winter nest egg." Eventually there was a separation and finally a divorce. She continued her long career as Mickey King.

In 1925 he went to work for George Christy's Lee Bros. Circus as principal wild animal trainer, working fourteen male and female lions in the performance. He was back with Sells-Floto in 1926, again with the Polar bears. He remained with that show through the 1929 season, the last year cat acts were used. That year King handled a twenty tiger act, as well as the tiger-riding horse number. Jules Jacot handled the three other cage acts. King remained with the Floto show as an inside reserve ticket seller.

On January 30, 1932 Clyde Beatty was attacked by his male lion Nero while rehearsing in the Peru winter quarters. King took over Beatty's act and played the Shrine dates in Detroit, Cleveland and Toronto. Beatty recovered and returned to his act for the Hagenbeck-Wallace tented season.

In 1934 Zack Terrell, former long time Sells-Floto manager, organized an animal show for the Standard Oil Co. of Indiana. It was called the Live Power Show of Standard Oil. The program included three elephants presented by Terrell's wife Estrella Nelson, and a five lion and four tiger presentation by Allen King. King's act was called the Cage of Fury. Four free performances a day were given on a permanent outdoor stage. A giant red crown was over the steel arena advertised Standard Red Crown Superfuel. The gasoline company's slogan was "More Live Power per Gallon." King's large male lion Jimmy was the feature of the act. Alice was the lead tiger.



The following year Terrell and Jess Adkins, long-time manager of the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, formed the Indiana Circus Corporation and established winter quarters at Rochester, Indiana. Clyde Beatty was lured away from the Hagenbeck show as the feature. The new circus was called the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus. The animals Beatty had worked on the Hagenbeck show were owned by the Ringling organization, so he had to break a new act.

The new circus acquired the animals that had been with the Standard Oil show and Allen King came with them as trainer. King began rehearsing the act and added some more cats. He had a dozen lions, tigers and leopards to start. One day a black leopard attacked a new tiger that was being broken, then another leopard jumped into the brawl. King succeeded in breaking it up, but all three animals were injured. He came out of it untouched.

The big new Cole show opened in Chicago and then started the tented season. The depression quickly cut into the show's business. On June 27 in Cumberland, Maryland the circus was cut down with fifteen cars sent back to the barn in Rochester. Six elephants and the King cage act were on the train.

Ray Marsh Bryden had bought the Bays Bros. truck circus in 1935 and changed the name to Rice Bros. He leased the elephants, Kate, Barney and George, and the King wild animal act from Adkins and Terrell. King's cage act on Rice Bros. included five male lions, three females, two tigers and two black leopards. At the end of the season King returned the cats to Rochester and retired as a wild animal trainer.

King found work as a policeman at the Ford Motor Company in Detroit. Some years later he got restless for the circus life. In the spring of 1942 he framed a small truck circus, calling it King Bros. Winter quarters were established at 121 Selsen Avenue in Detroit. A new white 110 foot round big top with one 50 foot middle was bought. Clint Finney was hired as general agent. He leased the Harry Haag elephants, Judy and Alice. The nine person Zavatta-Zoppe riding act was contracted. L. Claude Myers had the band. On June 18 the can-



Allen King Cole Bros. litho used early in the 1935 season. Pfening Archives.

vas truck was wrecked, killing one and injuring four. The show laid off for four days late in July to revamp. The trucks were cut to seven, and the circus somehow made the season. The circus opened on May 1 in Plymouth, Michigan and closed forever in Jonesboro, Arkansas on September 7.

King's venture into show ownership was a failure. From that time on he worked for other shows in various capacities. He was boss canvasman on the C. R. Montgomery Circus in 1946, and superintendent of transportation for Mills Bros. in 1949. In 1950 he returned to Mills with the added job of handling reserve seat

Nelson and his wrestling lion Princess Pat. Pfening Archives.



sales. In 1951 he was with Biller Bros.

While in Chicago on Biller Bros. business King died of a massive stroke at the Illinois Masonic Hospital on September 15 at age 52. He was cremated and his ashes were returned to Cedartown, Georgia.

### Bert Nelson

Cardburt Nelson Snyder was born in Deming, New Mexico in 1905. He attended grammar school in Los Angeles. Nelson told of his early days in a March

30, 1935 *Saturday Evening Post* article: "As a seven-year-old boy out in Los Angeles, I learned a lot about training animals while working with a house cat and two pink-eyed mice. Although I had never seen a cat or mouse do an act, I taught my pets to walk a tight wire by using the reward system advocated by many psychologists in training children."

"So well did the reward system work that it wasn't long before my pets were such excellent performers that I was able to get bookings for my act at four or five Main Street theaters."

"It was while exhibiting my trained rat-cat troupe that I saw my first circus. Naturally, the most interesting events under the big top were the animal acts. I don't believe I even looked at the aerialists or clowns. I had eyes only for the lions and made up my mind to become a lion tamer. But first I must have a lion! When I had saved one hundred and fifty dollars I went to the old E. & R. Film Jungle and bought a mangy cub. I named him Duke."

"Duke was a good student. When he had become expert in his act, I went to Al G. Barnes and asked for chance to show what I could do with my lion. That grand old man of the big top laughed at me and Duke, but in the end he gave us a chance to join up, and I became a full-fledged circus performer. Less than three years later I was working a cage of ten cats."

Nelson was sixteen when he first joined the Barnes show in 1921 where head trainer Louis Roth broke the youngster into the ways of the big cage. After a year, vaudeville beckoned and for the next few years he exhibited Duke in various southern California theaters. Nelson wrote: "The glamour of stage life paled, and at nineteen I was back in the Barnes circus as an animal



trainer. This experience gave me the opportunity to greatly enlarge my animal education, since I had not only worked with lions but with polar bears, tigers and other animals." The 1924 Barnes program lists Nelson presenting eight lions and a group of polar bears.

For the next few years Nelson worked various animal acts at Woodford's European Circus at Long Beach and at the Selig Zoo in Los Angeles. He wrote: "But again fate--or a fat salary offer--decreed that I leave the sawdust arenas for the theater. When I went on the Keith-Albee vaudeville circuit with Princess Pat, the original wrestling lion, a storm of protest went up from my colleagues in the animal training world. They didn't object to my wrestling with the king of beasts, but they did resent the fact that I dealt a body blow to the traditional hurrah with which animal acts had heretofore been staged. Instead of coming out before the footlights adorned in the conventional glittering uniform, shiny leather boots, revolver, snake whip and chair, I made my entrance in evening clothes, top hat and all!"

In 1927 Nelson returned to the Barnes show. He worked a male lion group, a large lion, and tiger act, a lion riding a horse and the wrestling with Princess Pat. It would be seven years before he would again perform under the big top.

The motion picture industry provided work for many wild animal trainers, doubling for famous actors. Nelson held a contract with Metro-Goldwin-Mayer for a period in the early 1930s. He doubled for Johnny Weissmiller in all of his Tarzan films. Whenever the ape man had a part requiring that Tarzan be seen near the animals.

Nelson wrote: "Perhaps the most dangerous job I ever did was in *Tarzan and His Mate*, filmed in 1933. If you saw this picture you will remember the scene where Jane, heroine of the story, called to Tarzan from a tree across a jungle clearing. Tarzan, on the opposite side of this area, was supposed to drop from his tree at her call and walk toward her, a distance of about a hundred yards.

"In the clearing were forty feeding lions, each snarling and tearing at a manlike dummy stuffed with horse meat, to make it realistic. Those li-



A 1935 Hagenbeck-Wallace litho featuring Nelson. Pfenig Archives.

ons formed two lines that stretched across the arena, leaving a lane between them of about eight feet at the widest. Tarzan--or rather I--was supposed to walk through that narrow lane of hunger-maddened cats, looking straight ahead--while the cameras cranked.

"Off to the side was a track upon which was a small car supporting a cage for the cameraman. As I walked, the camera would move parallel, shooting the scene. On the car were Louis Roth, animal trainer, and Louis Goebel, owner of the famous Goebel Lion Farm. Each held rifles. It had been prearranged that they were to call a warning in the event that any of those cats left their feeding to stalk me. I strode through their midst.

"The signal to drop from the tree and start forward came. Into that rending pack I stepped. Savage, blood-smeared heads lifted momentarily and wicked eyes glared as those first big cats watched me pass their kills. My legs almost brushed their noses.

"One-third of that menacing avenue I had negotiated when cries of 'look out!' went up both sides. I whirled, reaching for the blank pistol in holster hidden in my loincloth. It stuck. Two cats, not five feet away, crouched tense in the attitude well known to animal men. They were preparing for a charge.

"There was only one thing I could do. I did it. I called their bluff. With a yell I leaped at that furious pair, brandishing an imaginary stick. They backed down and returned to their respective dinners. I walked on to my tree.

"Was the scene finished? It was not. Jimmy MacKay, director, called for a retake. Four times I went through that stunt before MacKay was satisfied.

In December 1934 Jess Adkins and Zack Terrell announced they would tour a new circus in 1935. The wild animals Beatty had worked on the Hagenbeck show were the property of the Ringling organization, owner of the circus. Beatty had to break a new act for Cole Bros. and the Hagenbeck

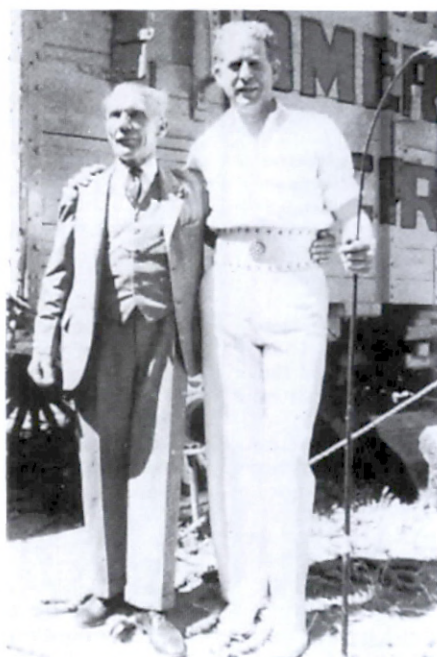
circus had to find a trainer for that show. The December 8, 1934 *Billboard* reported: "Bert Nelson, of Tarzan fame, has arrived in Peru with several of his own mixed cats which will be added to the animals worked by Beatty. Nelson will replace Beatty in the featured wild animal spot and will have forty-two cats." One of the cats brought by Nelson was Norma, his wrestling lion. She was to be a feature of the act.

The February 23, 1935 *Billboard* reported John Helliott was breaking a mixed group of cats for Madam Rasputin to work in the Hagenbeck-Wallace winter quarters. Helliott was also working with Nelson on the large act. Six wild animal groups were worked by Rasputin, Helliott and Nelson at the annual Peru El-

Mabel Stark, Terrell Jacobs and Bert Nelson on Al G. Barnes in 1936. Pfenig Archives.







Louis Roth and Nelson on Great American in 1939. Joe Bradbury collection.

elephant Stampede just before the season's start.

The 1935 Hagenbeck-Wallace-Forepaugh Sells Circus opened in the Coliseum in Chicago on April 20. The performance included two cage acts. A mixed group of bears and cats were worked by Helliott in place of the injured Rasputin. Display five was the large wild animal group presented by Nelson.

The Hagenbeck circus was taken off the road in 1936 and Nelson was sent to the circus where he started, Al G. Barnes. He joined Mabel Stark and Terrell Jacobs both of whom had been on that show in 1935. Prior to leaving for the Barnes show in 1936 Nelson badly sprained his ankle while rehearsing in the Peru winter quarters when a new lion was being introduced to the act. He was rescued by Helliott. The act then worked the Detroit Shrine Circus.

On March 3, 1936 twenty-one animals, shifting boxes and equipment for Nelson's act were shipped from Peru to the Barnes quarters in Baldwin Park, California. The wild animals included eight male lions, four female lions, three male tigers and seven female tigers, all show-owned, and three lions owned by Nelson.

Nelson was again featured with the Barnes show in 1937 where he worked twelve lions and twelve tigers. The July 1937 *Popular Science* contained an article about Nelson ti-

tled, "When Lions and Tigers Mix in the Circus."

When the Al G. Barnes Circus opened the 1938 season Bert Nelson was not with it. Mabel Stark and Frank Phillips were. Stark continued with the show after the Ringling-Barnum features were added in mid-season at Redfield, South Dakota.

Nelson's last appearance with a circus was with the short-lived twen-

ty car Great American Circus in 1939. The circus opened on May 24 and closed on May 31. He was equestrian director and presented four lions and five tigers from Jungleland, and a seal act.

Nelson worked in Naval intelligence during World War II. He died at age 71 on June 16, 1975 in Ventura, California, following a severe heart seizure two days earlier.

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1897

The first word on the Hawkins & Loomis Dog and Pony Show appeared in the *Emporia Daily Republican* on July 16, 1897: "Prof. C. F. Hunt will arrive this evening with a bunch of ten French poodle dogs, elegantly trained. Prof. Hunt is the man who trained the dogs for the great Gentry show. These dogs will be a part of the Hawkins dog and pony show which is soon to start out from here.

"Mr. A. H. Loomis, who has joined Mr. Hawkins in this enterprise, thinks the show will give its first performance here next week. The tent which is 100 x 150 feet, with a seating capacity of 3,000, is expected tonight. The show will give its first performance here, going on the road immediately after."

The *Republican* published a more extensive report on the 24th. "During the past years Emporia has developed remarkable talent in music, athletics and other branches of accomplishments. But a new turn has just been developed by J. H. Hawkins of this city.

"Eleven years ago he opened a Kandy Kitchen in this city, having come from Iowa where his father and uncles are engaged in the stock business. 'Johnny' brought a number of Shetland ponies with him and since then he has devoted his time to them. He has purchased and raised a number since that time, and about three years ago he concluded to train them and start on the road. He has a group of dogs, also, amounting in all to about fifty head of stock.

"Mr. A. H. Loomis has formed a partnership with him, and under the firm name of Hawkins & Loomis, will make a tour of the south and west.

"Mr. Loomis is well known in this city, having been in the employ of the Citizens' bank for the past three years.

"He resigned to accept the partnership with Mr. Hawkins. They are sparing no pains to make the show a success. These gentlemen, who are at the head of the aggregation, will succeed. It will not be a traveling gang of gamblers and robbers, but a company of gentlemen who will present everything as represented. They have a band composed largely of Emporia musicians which ranks

# ONLY BIG SHOW COMING NOW YOU WILL SEE the FINEST

VOL. V CHAPTER 3. PART ONE

By Orin Copple King

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second to none in the state.

"They will give their initial performance in this city on Wednesday evening of next week [July 28], followed by two performances on Thursday afternoon and evening. They will show at the popular price of ten and twenty cents.

"Arthur Loomis returned from Salina yesterday [July 26]," the *Re-*

This Hawkins & Loomis ad appeared in the *Emporia Daily Gazette* on July 28, 1897. Kansas State Historical Society.

pony show tonight.

"The dog and pony show discounts all others. Prices 10 and 20 cents.

"Don't fail to see the dog and pony show on Ninth and Commercial street tonight, tomorrow afternoon and evening.

"Don't fail to see the Hawkins & Loomis Dog and Pony shows on Wednesday and Thursday of next week. They show under the largest tent of any dog and pony show in the United States. Over fifty trained animals. Price 10 and 20 cents.

"Don't miss seeing the Shetland ponies in their various and surprising acts tonight at the corner of Commercial street and Ninth avenue. They delight the old as well as the young. Go. Price 10 and 20 cents."

On the first day of the run the *Republican* reported on the parade. "Hawkins and Loomis' dog and pony show gave one of the best street parades today ever seen in the city. The outfit was new throughout. The band boys wore bright red coats, the ponies had bright rigging and the dogs were clean and pretty. The band is composed of nearly all Emporia boys, which is sufficient guarantee of its excellence. Fred Fletcher operates the big tom-tom and is a whole show in himself. Before the show returns Fletcher will be one of the attractions and will not appear on the street. Billy Hollandsworth, who is with the band, will do some fancy dancing on the back of a pony running at full speed, and Will Keefer will be used to draw the feminine portion of the audience. He will pose just before the performances. But you should see the show."

Following the opening the *Republican* reported that, "Everybody was at the dog and pony show last evening except Nye Martin and he is going tonight. It was a society event. All Emporia from the lower five of Stringtown to the upper ten of the West Side was at the show.

"Everybody was surprised and delighted at the excellence of the show. Emporia knew, when it was an-

Don't Forget to See

Hawkins & Loomis



DOG and  
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of any similar show in the United  
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Over 50 Trained Animals.

Admission 10 and 20 cts.

Wednesday and Thursday  
evenings and Thursday after  
noon.

JULY 28 and 29.



nounced that Johnnie Hawkins and Arthur Loomis would put a dog and pony show on the road, that it would be a good one, because both the men are hustlers, but nobody expected the excellent performance of last night. From parade to good-night the show was a success. Prof. Hunt, the ringmaster, is an artist of experience in his business and understands the natures of ponies and dogs perfectly. The ponies performed as difficult feats as were ever seen in Emporia, and the dogs were simply a marvel. It would be an exacting and super-critical audience that would kick on the performance last night. It was magnificent."

"The Hawkins & Loomis combined dog and pony show," according to the *Republican*, "made its second and last appearance before an Emporia crowd last night. The performance was even better than the night before. The feats were more cleverly performed and the music was excellent. The clown pony excelled in her several performances. The two clown dogs were exceeding clever. The waltzing dog was probably the greatest attraction of the show, unless the waltzing pony be excepted. Other clever feats were the see-saw tricks by both the ponies and the dogs, and the jumping through a ring of fire by one of the ponies."

"The Hawkins-Loomis show is as good an equine and canine exhibition as ever was given in Emporia, and was largely attended. The show went from here to Cottonwood Falls, where it will perform today and tonight."

The show did not exhibit in Cottonwood Falls, Friday, July 30, but performed in Strong City two miles north of Cottonwood Falls.

E. B. Garwood left Emporia on July 26 to handle the advance at Strong City, Florence and Marion.

After the opening exhibition Wednesday evening, which was witnessed by over 2,000 people, the *Gazette* gave the show a good review. "If there had only been more people from the country at the show last night, Emporia would have had a regular Barnum crowd. The tent was crowded clear up to the top, filling every seat under the biggest canvas covering any dog and pony show under the sun, which is true even though the phrase is old."

"The ponies were as pretty animals as have ever been shown in Emporia. They were well groomed and looked happy. They performed tricks, new and old, which made the

children clap their hands. 'Spot,' the white and bay pony, and 'Mouse,' the clown pony, made the hits among the pony part of the show.

"The dogs are old stagers. Mr. Hunt, the trainer, has them entirely under control. 'Friday' was the star performer along with 'Romeo' and 'Juliet.'

"The dogs rode the ponies and jumped through rings of fire just as Madame de Jumpabus with Forepaugh's did."

"Taken all through, the show was the best which has ever been in Emporia."

The workmen about the show are courteous and no ragged language was heard about the tent. The band is good. They have soloists who understand music."

On August 31, the *Gazette* reported that, "Hawkins & Loomis' dog and pony show is in Nevada, Missouri, today. They will play in Carthage tomorrow. They have two new seventy foot cars with staterooms for the boys so that they are traveling in style."

The *Florence Bulletin* reporting the exhibitions of July 31, stated that, "Hawkins & Loomis' dog and pony show exhibited in this city last Saturday afternoon and evening to good crowds. The people connected with the show conduct themselves properly and give good performances."

Hutchinson saw the show on Saturday, August 6 and Monday, August 8. No performances were given on Sunday.

Hawkins & Loomis billed Chanute for August 18 and 19th. The *Daily Tribune* was impressed. "Hawkins & Loomis gave their first performance in this city yesterday evening. The big tent was packed with people, many of the late-comers being unable to find seats. The small boy and his sister were in evidence and it seemed as if the entire juvenile out-put had been brought to see the animals by their accommodating parents."

"The entertainment was quite good. The performance of the dogs caught on better than the tricks by the horses. This was perhaps because they seem to take more interest than the equine performers. They looked very conceited in a doggyish way when some unusually clever trick called for a round of applause, and when an occasional slip caused an accident they slunk back to their chairs with a much humiliated air."

"After the conclusion of the entertainment the children were allowed to ride the ponies about the ring, and many a little one was delighted to have a brief ride on the pretty Shetlands."

Galena in the extreme southeast corner of Kansas attended the show on September 9, 10 and 11. After the opening night the *Galena Times* reported that, "The town was certainly lively last night: a band concert, a dog and pony show, a repertoire company at the opera house and a half dozen street fakirs."

And, "The Hawkins & Loomis dog and pony show drew a large crowd last night. They will remain over tomorrow and give a children's matinee in the afternoon and the regular performance in the evening."

The big story in Galena broke on Friday. "Last night between 8 and 9 o'clock Zilpha White, the 17-year-old daughter of Lige White, and Lottie McMurtry, the 14-year-old adopted daughter of Geo. McMurtry, of East Galena, in company with Alfred Games, 16-years-old, skipped out."

"The girls took a small bundle of clothes with them."

"The parents of the girls supposed them to be out visiting somewhere, but when it grew so late and they did not arrive the family with the assistance of Officer Keelin instituted a search. White found them hidden under the dog show car on the Frisco track, but as soon as discovered they all ran away and were soon lost in the darkness again."

"The search was kept up all night. After they escaped from the show car Officer Keelin got track of them out near the race track and it was supposed they were headed toward Joplin. The parents drove to Joplin at once, but found no trace of them."

"It is the general opinion that they have joined the dog and pony show. An effort will be made to locate them if possible."

A follow-up story on the 17th reported the demise of the circus dream. "Zilpha White and Lottie McMurtry, who started out Wednesday to join the dog show, were brought home today by Marshal Gill, of Baxter."

"He found them wandering around in that locality [Baxter Springs]. They said they started on the hunt of the show but could not catch it and had started home. They also stated





they walked to Melrose and Chetopa yesterday.

"They were indeed sorry looking sights when they reached town this afternoon. So dirty that they could hardly be recognized. This will perhaps teach them a lesson not to follow a show again."

The Hawkins & Loomis Dog and Pony Show is known to have exhibited in the following Kansas towns in 1897: July 28, 29, Emporia; 30, Strong City; 31, Florence; August 2, Marion; 6, 8, Hutchinson; 11, Peabody; 17, Fredonia; 18, 19, Chanute; 23, 24, Coffeyville; 26, 27, 28, Pittsburg; September 9, 10, 11, Galena.

\*\*\*\*\*

Very small shows gathered very small news coverage as they toured Kansas in 1897.

"Cullins Brothers shows will exhibit at Washington on August 28th. Admission only 10 cts. Will show both morning and evening." The Washington *Post-Register* carried the announcement on August 27.

\*\*\*\*\*

The fair at Ottawa, September 21 through the 25th, featured the Kennedy Wild West. The Ottawa *Evening Herald*, September 21, commented that "Kennedy's Wild West show has arrived on the grounds and will give performances every afternoon."

\*\*\*\*\*

Many newspapers throughout Kansas in 1897 carried the same small story concerning the Wichita state fair. At Cottonwood Falls the *Chase County Leader*, September 23, reported, "Air Ship at Wichita."

"Every day at 10 o'clock during the Wichita State fair the wonderful airship will make a flight. This alone is worth the cost of going to the fair. Besides this, Gilbert's Dog

The Kennedy Bros. letterhead was printed in dark brown. Pfening Archives.



The Cullins brothers as pictured on their letterhead. Pfening Archives.

and Pony show, with the main features of the old one ring circus, goes on continually. Every day grand hippodrome races, standing and chariot. Good races every afternoon commencing Sept. 27, to Oct. 2, inclusive."

\*\*\*\*\*

"Shield's 10 cent museum and trained pony show, between Seventh and Eighth avenues on Commercial street will give its last performance this evening [July 27]. It is claimed Mr. Shields has the best trained horse in the world. Ladies' electrical exhibitions, Punch and Judy for the children, wire walking, specialties in comedy and other features make up an interesting evening's entertainment for old and young. Last chance for 10 cents."--*Emporia Daily Republican*.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Bonheur brothers for several years toured Kansas with shows about which little is known. Some years the performance had elements of the circus; other years, vaudeville. There was one field in which they

were outstanding--motion pictures.

The only report found for the season of 1897 appeared in the McPherson *Democrat*, September 24: "Another Show."

"The Bonheur Bros' show is coming to McPherson soon. These gentlemen in 1886 traveled to school houses in McPherson county, Kansas and Jim Bonheur at that time was working on designs for the machinery of an animate picture machine which he finished in the winter of 1886 when the big blizzard struck the brothers at Nelson's ranch near the Garfield school house. Geo. Nelson's house in McPherson county has the distinction of being the place where J. R. Bonheur finished his working plans which were sent to Edison for the final perfection of the animated picture machine called the Vitascope that astonishes the scientists of this day and age by transforming dead pictures into living realities like the touch of the Genii of Arabian folklore. The old scenic wagon where the idea was conceived is still owned by the Bonheur Bros' and will be with the show when it comes to McPherson."

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The *Kansas Star*, Wichita, reported November 5, that, "The F. J. Gentry pony and dog show has arrived in the city for winter headquarters. Mr. Gentry is an old time Wichita man and left here two years ago with his troupe (sic) of trained animals. He now has 25 ponies and a pack of finely trained dogs. They toured the eastern states this season, doing remarkably well. They have a fine Pullman and baggage car in their train. They expect this winter to break and train several more ponies."

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This writer's favorite circus personality did not appear in Kansas in 1897. The *New York Clipper*, November 13, had the following communication, "Col. Jas. T. Johnson's Amphitheatre and Circus, Hot Springs, Ark. Col. Jas. T. Johnson, prop. and manager; D. J. McNamarey, press agent; Geo. Atkinson, stage manager; Prof. Ledgewood, leader of band and orchestra; Four Flying Bicketts; Ray Burton; Ben Hamidy Troupe of Arabs; Kline Children; Geo. Garzoni; Dottie Bard."

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The season of 1897 in Kansas was marred by gambling, outlandish fakery, and physical violence perpetrated by second and third class shows. Not only did the smaller shows fight the public, but they also

THE FINEST HORSES USED BY ANY SHOW

**KENNEDY BROS.**  
HIPPODROME  
CIRCUS AND WILD WEST  
SHOWS

WORLD'S GREATEST SPECIAL  
ATTRactions

FOR  
FAIRS, EXPOSITIONS AND SUMMER RESORTS



waged a scurrilous war upon each other. The *Brown County World*, Hiawatha, remarked August 6 upon the combativeness. "One of the hottest circus fights in the history of the West is looked for in Nebraska and Iowa. McMahon Bros., Lemen Bros., and Hummel, Hamilton & Co. will for the next few weeks cover almost the same territory in the two states at about the same time and the fight is already very hot. Hummel, Hamilton & Co., have issued a circular denouncing the Lemon (sic) show, as has also the McMahon show. The advance men tear down the lithographs of other shows, and whenever opposition advancements meet there is a fight. W. E. Ferguson, advance man for the McMahon show, was smashed by a representative of the Hummel, Hamilton show at Council Bluffs, Tuesday [August 3], and Henry Einfeldt was saved by his identity not being known. A man who is traveling with a circus will fight a man with an opposition show on the least provocation, and a riot may result some day when two shows come together."

Hiawatha is in northern Kansas, nearly in Nebraska, and not far from Iowa.

A mediocre two-column ad appeared in the *World* on August 6. "Hiawatha, Tuesday, AUGUST 10TH. HUMMEL, HAMILTON & CO.'S Mastodon 3-Ring Circus Complete Menagerie and Racing Hippodrome. [Cut of woman ascending wire to top of tent] MR. WILLIAM SELLS,--THE CHAMPION! The Foremost of All Bareback Equestrians, Acknowledged by the Press, the Public and the Profession the Most Remarkable rider in the world. TWO EXHIBITIONS DAILY At 2 and 8 o'clock p. m. Doors open one hour earlier to permit inspection of menagerie."

A frequently used handout also ran on the 6th.

"On August 10, Hummel, Hamilton & Co.'s new colossal shows will exhibit in Hiawatha. This is a new show in this section, but it has already earned a name and reputation that insures for it a liberal patronage wherever it may go. The *Detroit Free Press* says 'Hummel, Hamilton & Co.'s circus is a good one.' The *Detroit Evening News*: 'The circus is given in three rings with a great display of imported novelties and the vast stretch of canvas is entirely occupied with a net work of rigging and apparatus used in the aerial performances.'"

Following circus day, the *World* reported that, "The short change man did a good business circus day, but whenever complaint was made to an officer the money was promptly refunded. A ticket seller or peanut man would ask his victim to give him a bill for small change. The victim would hand over his bill, the sharper would count the money into the victim's hand, close his hand down on top of it and presto change. When the victim went to count his cash awhile after he always found a shortage."

The *World* also remarked that, "Hummel, Hamilton & Co.'s circus was the best that has been here for several years. The menagerie was small, but the other features of the show were up to date."

"Homer Parsons shot John Fletcher, jr., Tuesday evening at the circus grounds," according to the *World*. "Parsons and an Atchison negro named Gorman had a fight in the morning in which Parsons got the worst of it. Parson appeared on the circus grounds early, looking for the negro. He found him sitting on the sidewalk across the street from the tents, where at least fifty others were sitting watching the crowd. Parsons walked up within five feet of the negro and said, 'Now, I'll git you,' and fired. The powder severely burned the face of Fannie Duff, who was with Gorman, who as Parsons spoke jumped to run, as did about everybody else in sight. Young Mr. Fletcher, who is somewhat crippled, was slower motioned than the rest of the crowd and got the second shot in his

This Hummel, Hamilton newspaper ad appeared in the *Council Grove Courier* on September 21, 1897. Kansas State Historical Society.

## Council Grove September 21.

Now you will see the Finest, the World's Best,

Largest and Foremost Exhibition

Ever conceived and exhibited at Popular Prices

HUMMEL, HAMILTON AND CO'S

+ MASTADON +

THREE RING CIRCUS.

Complete Menagerie and Racing Hippodrome!  
Rare and interesting Zoological Exhibit. All earth's animal kingdom on View. Savage Wild Beasts, Educated and tamed to docile, tractable pets, presenting most remarkable Performances.

Mm. Sells the Champion,

THE FOREMOST of all Bareback Equestrians, acknowledged by the press, the public and the profession the most remarkable rider in the world.

Grand, Free Street parade  
At ten o'clock in the morning.

TWO EXHIBITIONS DAILY At 1 o'clock and at 8 p. m. Doors open one hour earlier to permit of inspection of menagerie.

hip, the ball lodging in his left leg. Parsons fired a third time into the air and started west on the walk. Charles Hill, Will Brooks and others would have stopped Parsons but he coolly shoved his gun in their faces and they let him pass. He ran west to the first alley then north half a block and back to the railway yards where he was lost among the cars by those following him. Mr. Fletcher was carried into the home of Mrs. Zimmerman near by, where Drs. Bliss and Alexander quickly dressed the wound, when he was taken to his home south of town. While the wound is deep it is but a flesh wound and is not considered serious. Parsons has not been seen since the shooting. He has a younger brother in the reform school and has served a term there himself."

There is no further information about the shooting.

A handout in the *Atchison Daily Champion*, August 2, ended with, "One great innovation is the opening at the top of the main tent which is cut away in such a manner that the cooling breeze is readily admitted to the interior, but by no means can the rain or sunshine interfere with the performance or the comfort of the audience. Notwithstanding the torrid temperature of the afternoon, it was cool and pleasant in the tent."

Along side the handout was an undistinguished two-column ad announcing the coming to Atchison on August 11, of Hummel, Hamilton & Co. which was "The World's Best, Largest and Foremost Exhibition Ever Conceived and Exhibited."

A handout on the 5th named some of the performers. "A troupe of Japanese acrobats did some fine work, which consisted of high balancing acts, ladder gymnastics and juggling. Prof. Tyler's educated dogs created no end of fun for the young people, and the three LaMartine brothers showed themselves to be first-class tumblers. Minerva, the strong woman, handled heavy weight as though they were toys, and Herr Blatt caught a cannon ball fired from a cannon. Miss Stow did a clever act on the flying rings, and there were numerous other performers on the trapeze. James McEllroy did a neat bare back turn, and the clowns were busy all the time, cracking jokes and playing tricks."

On show day the *Champion* commented that, "Every circus brings some new wrinkle to town. The Hummel, Hamilton & Sells show wins lots of praise by placing the seats under





The Hummel, Hamilton three pole big top. Author's collection.

cover and leaving the space over the rings open to the air and sunshine.

"A crowd of girls assembled at Tenth Street this morning to see the circus unload and were very indignant (sic) when it stopped at Thirteenth street."

The show brought Atchison its share of circus troubles. "The show came and went and no robberies in town were reported to the police this morning. There was a good crowd at the afternoon performance and twice as many in the evening. There was but one accident and that was in the afternoon during the Roman race. One of the men riding two horses fell and the six horses in the race were bunched over his prostrate body, but fortunately he was not struck by any of their hoofs.

"The only racket occurred about 4 o'clock in the afternoon when what might have been a serious fracas was averted by the coolness of Patrolman Gothard. Two negroes, Taylor Bryant and Dutch Waters, were telling the policeman how a stand was working a flimflam game by making short change, when a circus man overheard them. The stand men made for Taylor Bryant. They

The Hummel, Hamilton menagerie tent and lettered baggage wagon on left. Author's collection.



would yell 'Let me at him,' and Policeman Gothard stood in front of Bryant, asked for no fighting and threw the circus men back. One man shoved a stake through the mass of bodies and cut the skin on Bryant's throat. Another blow from a club inflicted a severe bruise on the back of Gothard's hand. When Bryant thought he was about to be overpowered he reached and took the policeman's revolver from the scabbard, which was easy for him to do, as Bryant was just behind the officer. Gothard felt the movement at his side and grabbed the gun as it was being taken. He managed to clear a way and get Bryant out. If the revolver had been discharged there would probably have been a serious melee. At Hiawatha Tuesday night a negro was shot by another at the show."

The last word in the *Champion* was that, "Hummel & Hamilton's show left last night for St. Joe over the Missouri Pacific."

In September the show exhibited in Council Grove on the 21st. Where it played the day before has not yet been discovered.

The Council Grove *Guard* reported that, "The circus next Tuesday will show on the vacant space just south of the fair grounds. They pay the fair association \$10 for the use of the grounds and a license of \$20 to the city."

After show day the *Guard* made no comment, but the Council Grove

*Courier* had two observations. "The show has come and gone and some of the boys who made change with the fakes have less money, but are wiser than they were before."

And, "The Hummel, Hamilton & Co's shows that have just visited us did not fill the expectation of those who patronized it, but it might have been worse. The company paid all its obligations and was perfectly square in that particular."

The Burlington *Daily News*, beginning September 10, carried nine insertions of the same advertisement for the Hummel & Hamilton exhibitions of September 22.

A handout September 13, named several of the performers. "The Hummel & Hamilton circus is especially strong in riders. The list of equestrians is headed by the famous William Sells, acknowledged to be the greatest living bareback rider today in the world, and also includes Mr. Wm. Dutton, Mr. Frank Miller, Mr. James McElroy, Master James Dutton, Miss Mollie Murry, Miss Effie Dutton, and Miss Kittie Davene, all of whom stand foremost in the ranks of equestrians and equestriennes. This show is managed and directed by Mr. Sells, and this fact is sufficient to guarantee the exceptional brilliant strength of the riders as well as every other detail of its extensive program. Two exhibitions will be given at 2 and 8 o'clock, the doors opening one hour earlier."

Willie Sells was mentioned in the advertising in every town and in a few handouts, but there is no mention of Willie riding at any performance. By 1897 Willie was fat enough to frighten a horse.

The *News*, an evening publication, related on show day that, "The show arrived at an early hour over the Katy and pitched its tents on the commons near the Katy depot. The show was met by the usual crowd of sight-seers, who broke their morning naps in two to see the big elephant push the animal cages around with his head. The town people loafed around and watched the circus 'Rubes' drive stakes and put up the tents, and also went over to their dining tent and rubbered at them while they ate their breakfast. The salaried performers eat at a table which sports a white table cloth, dishes, etc., while the roustabouts eat at a plain board table which is supplied with tin plates and cups.



The fare consisted principally of oatmeal, beef bread (sic), potatoes and coffee.

"The parade given by the circus about noon was a slim affair. The streets were packed with people to view it and they were partially disappointed.

"The so-called circus performance inflicted on our people yesterday afternoon and evening was a very bum affair," the *News* reported. "We do them justice however in mentioning that they had several good attractions with them. The side show proved very interesting to lots of people, especially the country boys and a number of the smart sporting fellows about town. The cause of the excitement was the operation of that old well-known 'shell game.' One of the fakirs had a little table, three shells and a little rubber ball, by means of which he made business pick up for the sports. He would place the little ball under one of the shells, shuffle them all about and then bet the suckers that they couldn't pick out the shell that covered the ball. Of course it was dead easy. Just like taking candy from children or getting money from home. The boys had all heard of the game and that it could not be beaten, but they were a little smarter than most folks. The fakir's money looked so nice and easy that they would just take a little of it home. The man said it wasn't gambling, only drawing and that took the Sunday school boys into the game. Nothing definite as to the exact amount won by the fakir can be found out, but it is rumored that he got away with over \$1,200. Some of the heaviest losers made a holler to the authorities, but when the officers arrived on the grounds the man had disappeared. He is today probably working the same game in Humboldt, but he won't find a town as easy as Burlington again for some time. Never bet on another man's game. A card of thanks is now in order for suppressing the names of the suckers."

In another column the *News* identified the real suckers not as country bumpkins but as "dead game sports in this town who wear stand up collars and derby hats and green or tan shoes, and are on to all the ropes and up to snuff in everything.

"The circus that visited Burlington Wednesday was a small affair," in the opinion of the *News*, "but it attracted just as large a crowd as if it had been a bigger concern and taken more space in the newspapers

than it did. There has been a showman connected with this office for some time, and by association with him and hard study of the bills the publisher has become something of an expert reporter in that line and can criticize this show intelligently and with considerable technical knowledge. He can not give it unqualified praise."

Displaying his brilliant wit, the publisher continued, "He visited the performance in the afternoon under the impression that the purpose of the thing so far as the spectators were concerned was to see the animals and the bareback riders and the trapeze girls with large, muscular limbs and very little clothing. A lot of talkative gentlemen, however, pretty nearly convinced all hands that the real object was to buy red lemonade, song books and reserved seat tickets. They should be compelled to keep quiet and sell their goods only on application. Then there were not enough animals for all the children taken there to look at. There was only one pachyderm, although we were led to infer from the bills that there would be a whole herd. A show with but one pachyderm is no great shakes. The bills also mentioned a colossal aggregation, but couldn't be found in the animal tent. A warty little animal in a cage was the only aggregation in sight, but scientific name for that is stupendous aggregation. Space forbids a description of the difference between a colossal and a stupendous aggregation, but in cool weather it will be given verbally to any one who wants to know and will call at the office. One thing advertised was a Roman hyppodrome (sic), but as a matter of fact the hyppodromes they had were not Roman at all. The ordinary hyppodrome differs from the Roman, however, only in having a smaller bale of hay on its back. A behemoth was also advertised, but it couldn't be found without a microscope. Readers of this paper will also remember that they put in a picture of pachydermatous mammal, but there was no such thing shown. People looked in vain for an arenic triumph, a Hindoo necromancer, a phenomenal equestation and 'winged surprises in multiversant numbers.' There were no such animals, snakes or birds

there. In fact the show in many respects didn't do as it advertised, and that, together with the other fact that it took only three dollars' worth of space in the paper, makes it impossible to give it unstinted praise in these columns except at regular advertising rates. This will probably teach them a lesson."

W. A. Pierson, a blacksmith, lost a set of harness when the show left town.

At Humboldt on September 23, the *Union* declared that, "The young man who did the bareback riding and tight rope performances for the circus here last week quit them at this place. He claimed they wouldn't pay

**Council Grove, {**

**TUESDAY**  
**September 21st**

YOU WILL SEE THE FINEST,  
The World's Best, Largest and Foremost Exhibition Ever Conceived and Exhibited at POPULAR PRICES.

**HUMMEL, HAMILTON & COMPANY'S**  
**Mastodon 3-Ring Circus!**

Complete Menagerie and Racing Hippodrome.  
Rare and Interesting Zoological Exhibit.

All of Earth's Animal Kingdom on View. Savage Wild Beasts, Educated and Tamed to docile, tractable pets, presenting Most Remarkable Performances. MR. WILLIAM SELLS, the Champion, the foremost of all bareback equestrians, acknowledged by the press, the public and profession the most remarkable rider to-day in the world.



**Grand Free, New Street Parade at 10 a. m.**  
Terrific, Thrilling and Fearful Dive by Capt. Pierre Perrier, one hundred feet downward into a net.

Grand, glorious Balloon Ascension and Parachute Descent from the skies to the earth. All FREE on the Exhibition Grounds immediately upon the return of the street parade. Two Exhibitions Daily—at 2 o'clock and 8 o'clock. p. m. Doors open one hour earlier to permit of inspection of Menagerie.

A different ad appeared in the Council Grove *Guard* on September 10, 1897. Kansas State Historical Society.

him his wages. He was one of their best performers."

Willie Sells was notorious for cheating employees out of their wages and Hammel and Hamilton were no better.

Earl Anderson joined the advance when the Hummel-Hamilton crew finished billing the town for the exhibitions of Saturday, September 25.

Pittsburg suffered Hummel & Hamilton (and Willie) on Monday, September 27. The *Daily Headlight* complained, "Those who had reserved seats at the circus last night did not have the most pleasant place under the tent on account of the



# THE NEW CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

On July 24, 1997 the Circus Historical Society, Inc. was incorporated in the State of Ohio. This is a completely new and separate legal entity from the old and presently unincorporated organization of the same name. This was necessary to obtain limited liability and other benefits from being a non-profit corporation. It eventually will also allow donations to the organization to be tax deductible charitable gifts.

The incorporator of the new corporation is Fred D. Pfening, Jr. Its initial members as well as its initial Trustees are Fred D. Pfening, Jr., Fred D. Pfening III, and Fred Dahlinger, Jr. Fred D. Pfening III is the Ohio statutory agent. The new corporation's Articles of Incorporation and its Code of Regulations (Ohio's equivalent of by-laws) are available gratis to any member by writing Fred D. Pfening III, 1075 W. Fifth Ave., Columbus, Ohio 43212.

The initial Trustees adopted a resolution bringing into the new corporation as members all those who belonged in good standing to the old and presently unincorporated CHS. All assets of the old CHS will be transferred to the new corporation.

Governance of the new corporation is vested in a Board of Trustees, each of whom will be elected by the entire membership on an at-large basis. There will be no divisional representation as in the old CHS, but the Trustees' duties include those of the directors under the old divisional structure. To provide stability, Trustees will be elected for staggered terms. Initially, four Trustees will be elected for eight (8) years with five elected for four (4) years, so that thereafter approximately half the Board will be elected quadrennially.

Pursuant to the Code of Regulations, the initial Trustees have nominated the persons named on the ballot (found on page 3 of this insert) to serve as Trustees for the terms indicated for each. Members are requested to vote on each position, either for the nominee or a person written in. Further, the initial Trustees have nominated the persons named on the ballot to serve as the corporation's first slate of Officers. Several of the proposed Trustees are also nominated as Officers. Because they perform different legal functions from Trustees, it is very important to vote additionally for the offices of President, Vice-President, and Secretary-Treasurer as indicated on the ballot. The persons elected to these three offices will serve four year terms rather than two as in the past. Completed ballots are to be mailed to Karen F. Severson, CHS Election Commissioner, 734 Connie Road, Baraboo, Wisconsin 53913.



## VOTING INSTRUCTIONS

1. Remove the opposite page from magazine.
2. Mark your ballot.
3. Write in your CHS membership number.
4. Fold so return address is on outside.
5. Staple or tape folded ballot.
6. Place a 32 cent stamp on ballot.

Ballots must be received by December 15, 1997 to be counted. Send your's at once.

Only current CHS members are eligible to vote, not subscribers.



# CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

## 1997 Election Ballot

Write in your CHS membership number \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*\*

### TRUSTEES

8 Year term--vote for four.

Fred D. Pfening III \_\_\_\_\_ Richard J. Reynolds III \_\_\_\_\_

Dave Price \_\_\_\_\_ Al Stencell \_\_\_\_\_

Joseph S. Rettinger \_\_\_\_\_  
(Write-in)

4 year term--vote for five:

Fred Dahlinger, Jr. \_\_\_\_\_ John F. Polacsek \_\_\_\_\_

Guy Fiorenza \_\_\_\_\_ William L. Rhodes \_\_\_\_\_

Robert Kitchen \_\_\_\_\_ Margaret Shannon \_\_\_\_\_

John H. McConnell \_\_\_\_\_

Fred D. Pfening, Jr. \_\_\_\_\_  
(Write-in)

\*\*\*\*\*

### OFFICERS

Vote for one person for each office:

President \_\_\_\_\_ Richard J. Reynolds III

(Write-in)

Vice-President \_\_\_\_\_ Al Stencell

(Write-In)

Secretary-Treasurer \_\_\_\_\_ Dave Price

(Write-In)

**NOTE: Officers must also be elected as trustees.**



Place  
32 cent  
Stamp  
Here

Karen F. Severson  
CHS Election Commissioner  
734 Connie Rd.  
Baraboo, WI 53913



cushion grafters. One of these would offer a cushion to the people as they entered the reserve seat gate, and those who took one under the impression that they were free immediately had trouble on his hands, for no sooner would he get comfortably seated, before around would come a collector for 10, 15 or 25 cents to pay for the cushion. Some would argue the question with him and was slow about giving up the cushion or money, while some would give up the money or cushion without a murmur."

The *Pittsburg Kansan* reported that, "The best attraction we have seen with a side show for many a day is undoubtedly Prince Os-kazuma, the cannibal from Kaffir-land, Africa. The Prince is 'coffee colored' and lectures on the customs of his people and country in a very intelligent and interesting manner. He has a large collection of curios that he has gathered since leaving his home, as well as a large scrap



Hummel, Hamilton baggage stock tent with parade tableau wagon at left. Author's collection.

book in which he keeps all the newspaper accounts of himself and all his correspondence. Among some of his letters is one from the Queen of England with the large English seal on it. The Prince is the oldest son of the King from Kaffirland. He says his father is 'worth' 45 wives, while he had six when he was but 15 years of age."

Identical reports appeared in the *Augusta Journal* and the *St. John Weekly News* stating that "Since the Hummel and Hamilton circus was in Pittsburg a week ago, it has been discovered by the business men that

there is a good deal of counterfeit coin and its resemblance to the genuine is good."

The last word on Hummel & Hamilton was the comment of the editor of the *Sedan Lance* concerning the exhibitions in Cedar Vale on October 1. "The

town [Cedar Vale] was full of suckers last Friday and some of them got took in for about twenty or twenty-five dollars worth. Experience is a dear school, but the only school fools will learn in." In conclusion the editor commented, "Am so glad we went to the show broke."

Hummel, Hamilton & Co's 3 Big United Shows in 1897 played the following Kansas towns: August 10, Hiawatha; 11, Atchison; September 21, Council Grove; 22, Burlington; 23, Humboldt; 25, Galena; 27, Pittsburg; 30, Fredonia; October 1, Cedar Vale.

*Research funded in part by grants from Wolfe's Camera & Video Inc. Topeka, Kansas*

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The story of the survival of the American circuses during the most perilous period of our nation's history. Read about their involvement in the events encompassing and surrounding the Civil War—1860 to and including 1865. A marvellous, evocative picture of circus activity of the last century.

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by  
William L. Slout

The Civil War was an important period of transition for the American circuses. Follow them as they encounter the travails of the fighting. A story never before revealed in such fullness.

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# Mike Martin's Circus Hobby Hall

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**FUNNY**

**About A  
Dead Elephant**

**\$21.50  
Postpaid**

**Jack Bennett**

**"NOTHING FUNNY ABOUT A DEAD ELEPHANT" by Jack Bennett**

Don't be confused by the title ---- this is one circus book you won't put down, until you've read it all!

NO "I traveled one season with a show" tale, Jack's rambling remembrances cover year after year, show after show with some of the wildest, yet true happenings only someone really "WITH IT" could tell.

So, gather your clothes, pack your bag and join Jack on Kelly-Miller, Beatty-Cole, Birnam, John Strong, Gil Gray and more

Originally priced at \$25 - but has a few typos, so bargain priced at just \$21.50 Post paid and signed by the author .....

## **CIRCUS VIDEOS ----- BEST OF THE OLD & THE NEW**

**DOUBLE FEATURES:** Just like the old Saturday Matinees, here are two complete circus movies or programs on one 2 HR tape.

**A) 'UNDER THE BIG TOP'** 1943, with Jack LaRue and Marjorie Main.

**-PLUS- 'CAGED FURY'** 1951, with Buster Crabbe and Richard Denning. Here are two good circus pictures filmed with excellent under canvas scenes and spectacular fire sequences. You'll love this tape.

**B) 'PERILS OF THE JUNGLE'** 1954, with Clyde Beatty facing savage natives and killer gorillas in darkest Africa.

**-PLUS- 'BRING 'EM BACK ALIVE'** 1932, with Frank Buck journeying deep into the Malayan jungles in search of exotic animals. This is another pair of good films you're sure to sit back and enjoy!

**C) 1961 R/B TV HIGHLIGHTS**, hosted by popular entertainer Arthur Godfrey presenting a spectacular cast including Trevor Bale, Galla Shawn, Flying Gibsons and Zacchini's Cannon!

**-PLUS- 1964 ED SULLIVAN SHOW**, with the first American appearance of the fabulous Moscow Circus. Highlighted by several featured spots by master clown Oleg Popov.

**RARE & UNUSUAL:** Here are two tapes that are sure

to please! Both are Hobby Hall exclusives.

**D) 'CIRCUS PRINSESSAN'** 1995, Leave it to the Europeans to present a true "CIRCUS FIRST"- the world's only **All Female Circus!** And it's great! Created by Sweden's famous CIRCUS SCOTT, the show is First Class all the way, with fantastic aerial and ground acts, comedy and variety turns, presented by the very best female performers!

**E) 'CIRCUS AMERICA'**, In April 1974, the Capital Centre, presented the World Premier of a new circus in direct opposition to RINGLING/BARNUM! This was one for the record books! Offering top talent like Karl Wallenda, Tarzan Zerbini, Emmett Kelly plus scores of performers from 'round the world. Here's your chance to see what all the hullabaloo was about, when this upstart show gave Ringling a real run for it's money!

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